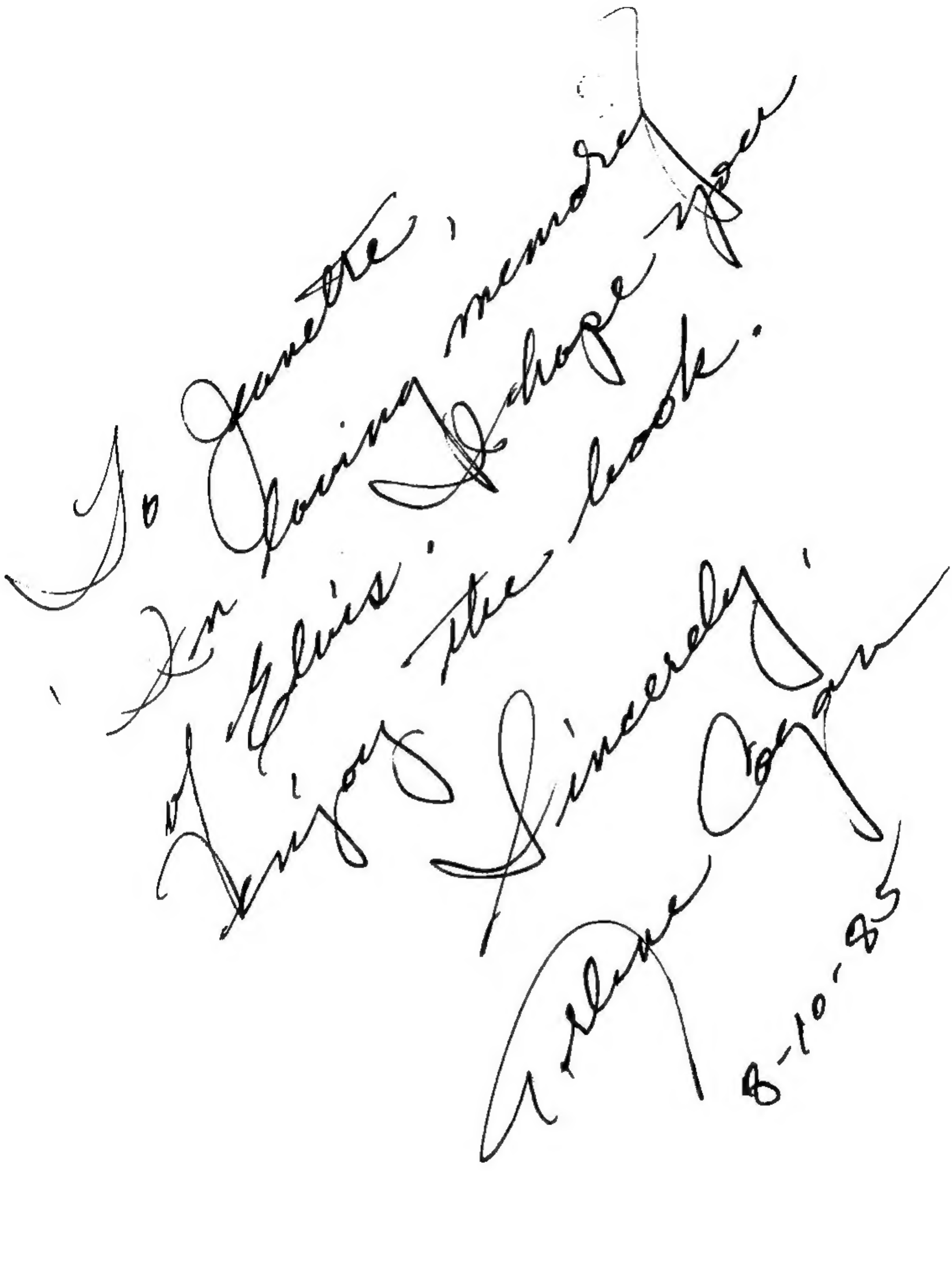
Elvis

This One's For You

by Arlene Cogan with Charles Goodman

CASTLE BOOKS



"This book reveals the love, warmth and humor that Elvis shared with everyone whose life he touched. I enjoyed reading it. Elvis would be proud."

Patsy Presley Gambill

CHAPTER 1

The Impossible Dream

When I was fourteen I began to dream the impossible dream.

It was called up out of my depths by a voice from Memphis singing about a Heartbreak Hotel and some old Hound Dog.

There was a little drugstore on Kimball Avenue about four blocks from Von Steuben High School where I was a freshman. Every afternoon after school was out, a bunch of us would go down there and sit in the last booth and sip sodas and talk — mostly about the new guy in Memphis, Elvis Presley.

The drugstore had a big magazine rack and I went through it every day, looking for anything new on Elvis. Pictures of him were absolutely unbelievable. It seemed impossible to me that any man could be that incredibly handsome and beautiful.

I kept saying, "When Elvis comes to Chicago to do a show I'm going to find a way to meet him personally."

They'd all laugh and say, "Sure, you and how

many million other people?"

"This is different," I said. "I know I'm going to meet him. I just don't know how it's going to happen."

When Elvis' first movie, *Love Me Tender*, opened at the Oriental Theater downtown, I left home early one Saturday morning to go see it. I stayed in the theater all day long, seeing it over and over. I didn't see anybody else leaving, either.

Whenever Elvis appeared on the screen there was so much screaming and crying in the dark that you couldn't hear what he was saying. I sat, watching him in total disbelief, wondering what there was in him that did this to people. I had to find out.

Some of the girls were ganged up in back of the theater around a girl who had won a trip to New York to meet Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show. She was telling them about Elvis. I listened to every little detail that she could remember. She lived way over on the other side of Chicago from me but I got her on the phone and kept her up half the night, telling me what Elvis was like, close up. It was the personal side of him, more than his music, that fascinated me.

"He is so much more handsome in person than any of his pictures ever show him," she said. "There is something in the way he moves. You have to see it to believe it. There is no other human being like him."

I was the president of an Elvis Presley fan club in Chicago and I tried to know all there was to know about him.

My father was an attorney and we lived at 6049 North Central Park. When I'd take the bus home from school each afternoon, I'd spend the time reading any new magazine I had found with an

Elvis story or picture in it.

One day on the bus, a big man got on and sat down beside me. He opened up his afternoon newspaper and settled back. There on one of the pages was a big picture of Elvis. He had the most beautiful eyes I had ever seen. They seemed to just *know* me. The headline said Elvis was coming to Chicago. "Oh, no," I said, softly.

This was what I had been waiting and hoping for, for so long. Now it was about to happen.

The man looked down at me curiously.

"Could I possibly see that page when you're finished with it?" I said. He nodded and glanced at the page. "You want this about Elvis?"

"Yes, sir."

He carefully tore out the whole page along the center crease and handed it to me. "Keep it."

"Thanks."

The story said Elvis was coming to the International Amphitheater with his stage show. When I finished reading it, I folded the paper carefully, put it in my lap and looked out the window at the buildings along the street.

What was I going to do, now that he was really on his way? Everyone would start kidding me about meeting him now.

As soon as I got home I put all my new magazines and the page from the paper in my room upstairs. I came back down to the phone in the hall and called the Chicago American newspaper's office downtown.

"Can I talk to Bill Becker, please?" I asked the switchboard girl.

Before the first ring ended, a familiar voice said, "Sports desk."

"Hi, Uncle Bill," I said, trying to sound casual.

"Arlene?"

"Uh, huh. Do you have a minute, Uncle Bill?"

I could hear all the newspaper noises behind him.

He listened to what I had to say.

"Uncle Bill, is there any way at all that you can get me backstage to meet Elvis?" I said. "This means more to me than anything in the world. I *have* to meet him. Please, Uncle Bill."

He sighed. "Arlene, let me see what I can do," he said. "I'm not going to promise anything but call me back tomorrow. Around noon."

They razzed me in the hallways at school, the next day.

"Hey, Arlene, has Elvis been in touch, yet?"

During lunch hour, I went to the pay phone near the school office and called the newspaper.

"Sports desk," a voice said at the Chicago American.

"Uncle Bill?"

"Hang on."

I began saying a little prayer I had learned as a child.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Uncle Bill. This is Arlene."

I was afraid to ask him.

"Arlene, I've got it set up for you to go to a press conference tonight for Elvis just before he does his show," Uncle Bill said. "I can't go because I have to cover sports. What you do is come down here and go to the press conference with our photographers who are covering it. They are expecting you.

"One other thing. I got you a ticket to the show. It's front row."

His voice sounded unreal to me. I couldn't believe what he was telling me. After all this time, I finally was going to be in the same room with

Elvis Presley, close up. *With enough nerve . . . maybe . . .*

"Uncle Bill," I said. "Could I possibly bring along a girlfriend? She's a member of my fan club. I sort of promised."

"Give me her name," he said.

"Barbara," I said.

"I'll tell the guys to be looking for a girl named Barbara," he said.

I hung up and ran down the hall. I found Barbara outside the gym. When I told her she was going with me to a press conference in a few hours for Elvis Presley and try to meet him, she turned pale.

It was March 28, 1957.

After school, Barbara and I didn't go home. It was still very early when we jumped on the subway and rode downtown to the Chicago American building. We took an elevator upstairs to where the photographers worked.

They were all kidding around.

"Remember," one of them said as he stuffed a huge leather bag with rolls of film and flash bulbs, "when you girls start feeling sort of faint around Elvis, let me know so I can get a picture of you when you keel over. My editor told me to come back with a lot of good stuff like that."

We got in a car with a couple of the photographers and rode over to the Saddle and Sirloin Club of the Stockyard Inn, a place near the Amphitheater where the press conference was to be held. The place was already swarming with photographers and reporters from Chicago and the surrounding states, some from as far away as New York.

Barbara and I were the only two teen-agers there. Except for one other girl who had won a ticket to the conference for winning a contest of

some kind. The rest of the people there were all adults and very professional. They looked awfully cool and self-contained compared to what Barbara and I were going through.

We found two folding chairs in the middle, a few rows back from the front where there was a long table set up with a bunch of microphones. We both sat very still and wide-eyed.

One of the Chicago American photographers leaned over my shoulder and said, "Remember, Arlene. When you feel faint, let me know. I really need some good feature stuff. You girls can be *immortal*."

Barbara bit her lip. "Arlene, I'm a nervous wreck."

She looked it.

"Oh, God, I am, too," I said, checking for the ten-thousandth time to make sure that I had brought my autograph book with me. "Listen," I said, "if you *do* see me getting pale or something . . ."

Just then, one of the doors on the left side of the room opened. The room got deathly still. Everything just stopped moving. It was scary.

"Oh, God, Barbara," I whispered. "*Now.*"

She covered her face hard with both her hands. "I can't watch."

"Get your hands down, Barbara. *He's coming!*"

One hand dropped from her face and snapped a death grip on my arm.

When I looked back, I saw Elvis coming out of the shadows into the open doorway. Someone was walking behind him a few steps.

Elvis walked quickly into the room. He was wearing a sports jacket and shirt, the exact ones he wore later when he made the movie, *Jailhouse Rock*.

He moved quickly across the front of the

room — not fast but with an unconscious grace and sexiness.

He was wearing golden shoes.

The shoes matched the gold suit he was going to change into, just before going on stage, following the press conference.

The news people were just like I was — stunned by Elvis. They hadn't expected that. They sat and stared, trying to get used to the idea that Elvis was real.

A Chicago deejay got up and introduced Elvis.

Then one of the reporters recovered well enough to ask a question. "Is it true you just bought a mansion in Memphis?" he asked.

Elvis nodded. "Yes, sir. But it's not in too good shape. They're doing a lot of work on it to get it in shape so my family can move in."

Before the questions really got going, Elvis sat down and looked around the room. He seemed nervous. There were pictures hanging on every wall — mostly of huge steers. They held rodeos nearby at the Amphitheater, as well as big stage shows and music concerts.

Elvis looked at every single one of the pictures. Then he started checking out every person in the audience. His eyes moved up one row and down the next.

His eyes swept across me and Barbara and then they did a double take. They came back to us. Elvis grinned. He winked. He seemed to feel more at ease when he saw a couple of teen-agers with their adoring faces out there in front of him.

A couple of reporters turned to look in our general area of seats. They didn't realize Elvis had winked at me and Barbara. They thought it must have been one of the other reporters.

"Barbara, did you see that?" I whispered.

Her fingers tightened on my arm and she nodded a mute "yes."

"I've got to *speak* to him," I whispered.

Barbara dropped her hand from my arm. She stared at me. "To *Elvis*?" she said.

"Yes, I have to, Barbara. I'm scared — but I have to."

All around us, reporters were now shooting up their hands and asking questions.

I weakly raised mine.

A lot of magazine writers and newsmen had been down on Elvis when he first hit big. Many churches forbade members to follow Elvis. Some radio stations banned his songs.

Nobody seemed to be able to take their eyes off Elvis. You had the feeling that if you looked away you would miss something. He was so incredibly handsome. So gracious and polite to everyone, even the ones who tried to ask mean questions.

It was always "Yes, sir" and "Yes, mam." Never a "Yeah."

Elvis kept answering everybody in that nice quiet voice of his and he kept glancing back at me and Barbara and smiling. Elvis actually seemed glad that Barbara and I were there!

All of a sudden I realized he was looking at me and *waiting*.

"Yes, mam?" Elvis said.

Those eyes . . . !

I had no idea what to ask him. I only wanted to speak to him and have him answer me.

Finally, I managed to say, "How long will you stay in Chicago?"

"This is our first stop on a ten-day tour," he said. "We'll rest a little after the show and then go on."

That special smile.

I just kept staring at him with a huge smile of total adoration on my face. He smiled back and moved on to another raised hand behind me.

Then his eyes drifted back to me — and he winked.

He made me feel a part of his personal scene.

All Barbara could do was look at him and sort of moan quietly.

A strange thing began happening.

All these reporters — men and women — who had been so hard on Elvis before they met him, now were treating him with a courtesy and a strange kind of friendship. Some of them even addressed him as "Mr. Presley." In his physical presence, they no longer could think of him as some kind of monster. They saw him for what he was and they liked what they saw. He was far more beautiful than his image.

Then the Chicago deejay got up and said, "That's all the time we have."

Elvis got up and nodded. "Thank you, very much, everybody."

There were shouts. Several of the reporters jumped up and shoved forward. Guys who had been putting him down all these months, in the papers and on the radio stations, were now crawling all over each other to get to him for a special statement.

I grabbed my autograph book and said, "Come on, Barbara. Let's try to get to him."

It was already too late.

There was a mob around him now. We couldn't get to him. I tried to see over them but I was too short. Flash bulbs were popping like crazy.

Then I saw Elvis looking over everybody's head at me and Barbara. He and the man he was with began pushing their way toward us.

"Sorry, guys," Elvis kept saying. "I got a show to do in a little while. Excuse me."

Finally, he worked his way to where we were. He put his arms around our shoulders. His hand felt so strong but there was an amazing gentleness in his strength.

He bent down and kissed me and said, "Is that you shaking or is that me?"

"Me," I said.

"I'm the same way," he said. "They scare me."

The press conference was over but reporters kept pumping questions at him. Someone asked again about Graceland.

"Well, I'll stay on at our place on Audubon for a while, of course," Elvis said. "Until they can get Graceland fixed up the way I want it. They're putting a wall around the place. You know."

Flash bulbs kept popping. Reporters kept yelling questions. Elvis was very polite through it all and very considerate.

Someone asked if all the fans bothered him.

He grinned. "I love them. Without them I'd be lost."

"You ever want to slip back into private life?" someone asked.

"If I stayed in private life I'd still be broke," Elvis said.

One ugly little guy asked him again, "You sure you don't tint your hair?"

Elvis said, "Yes, sir, I never needed to."

The man with Elvis showed him the watch on his wrist. Elvis patted my shoulder. It was time he had to go. *I hated it.*

Elvis hugged my shoulder and said, "What's your name, honey?"

"My name is Arlene," I said.

He reached for my autograph book and my

pen. He ignored the reporters' questions.

I nudged Barbara so she would say something, at least give him her autograph book the way she planned. She was just standing there in a trance, like she had been hypnotized.

Elvis flipped my autograph book shut and handed it back to me. He bent down and said, "Walk with me to the elevators."

They shoved us along like a wave. Elvis bent down and said something in Barbara's ear and she just looked up at him. He smiled and patted her shoulder and walked on.

"Elvis," I said, "will you sing, 'I Want You, I Need You, I Love You' in your show tonight?"

Elvis said, "Why? Do you like that song?"

"I love it."

"When I do it," he said, "it'll be for you."

Then he pushed through the open elevator door. Somebody braced it for him so it wouldn't shut on him. Reporters kept yelling.

Elvis turned and leaned down to kiss me on the cheek. "You're the cutest little thing, darlin'," he said. "If you get down to Memphis I want you to come to Graceland and see me. I mean it."

He had to be kidding but it was so nice to hear — words I would never forget.

"You want *me* to come see *you*?" I said.

Here I was, a kid with braces on my teeth, and Elvis Presley was asking me to come see him.

"I can see me getting past your guards down there," I said.

"They'll let you through," he said. "They'd better. Just come on down."

"Elvis, you'll probably never remember me," I said.

The man with him put a hand on his arm.

"Honey, I won't forget you. I promise," Elvis said.

Oh, his unbelievable eyes!

Then the elevator doors closed and Elvis was gone.

Everybody milled around the shut doors.

I clutched my autograph book. Elvis would meet so many people on this tour alone that it seemed impossible to remember me. But it was so sweet a thing to promise.

"My God, Barbara," I said. "Why didn't you speak to him? You wouldn't say a *word*. Wouldn't even answer him when he spoke. What's wrong with you?"

"I tried to say something to him," she said. "Nothing would come out. I tried."

Her eyes had a bright light as if they might have tears in them.

"Come on," I said, grabbing her arm and pulling her toward an elevator to take us down.

It was night outside and we went straight over to the Amphitheater. Elvis hadn't come on yet. The place was a bedlam. I thought we would never make it to our seats down front.

Then they announced Elvis and when he didn't come in at once everyone started screaming even louder.

They had hired forty firemen, a hundred policemen and nearly two hundred professional ushers to control more than ten thousand fans — and they were losing their grip. Two guys were hanging from the balcony railing. They dropped down into the mob, apparently trying to get closer to Elvis. One girl kicked an usher in the stomach and they carried him out with others who apparently had fainted.

After a while, Elvis came down the stairs and

onto the stage. All in gold. He came down slowly, as if he was a little concerned about all the screaming people surging toward him. Girls were packed around the front of the stage and the police were sagging back from them. Then Elvis shrugged and smiled.

He came on down the stairs and with a shake of his shoulders he started into his first song. There was a moment of hush and then all the words were lost in a steady scream from the whole auditorium.

They couldn't get the girls out when they fainted around the stage. They just lifted their bodies like sacks and passed them along over everybody's heads until they were out of the mob.

They had a kind of railing built on the front of the stage to keep people away from Elvis. The whole scene was crazy — and utterly thrilling.

Elvis didn't know where I was. He never did see me. So I just got up and screamed like everybody around me.

Too soon, Elvis finished his last song. He turned and ran off the stage.

People charged the stage to touch the floor where Elvis had stood and to feel the microphone that he had held. One woman swung her purse at a policeman trying to hold her back. He ducked and the purse hit an usher in the chin, stunning him.

Leaving the show, everyone still looked dazed, as if wondering what had happened to them. Some of them clutched their temples and wept.

I heard two policemen talking and one of them said, "I thought he acted pretty nice up there."

Barbara just babbled the whole way home. At the same time, I was turning inward and more silent than usual.

After meeting Elvis so briefly, I knew I would not be happy until I saw him again. He had seemed to be someone who cared for you as a person, even if you weren't somebody big and important. He hadn't acted like he thought he was some bigshot superstar and we were all nobodies. In a strange way, he made you feel you were important to him.

When I got home, Dad was already in bed. I told my mother all about the press conference. I told her what Elvis had said to me afterward, before he got on the elevator.

My throat was hoarse from all the screaming.

Mother didn't seem to take it very seriously, none of it but the hoarse throat which she made me take medicine for.

"You're crazy about Elvis, aren't you?" she said. "It all reminds me of how Rudolph Valentino drove all the girls mad. But I guess we all grew up and got over it."

"Mother, I have to see Elvis again," I said.

She sighed and hugged me. "Just don't get *too* carried away. Not just yet, anyway, baby."

When spring vacation came, I asked mother if she would drive me down to Memphis.

She looked at me and smiled. "You know, I need a break myself. Let's go."

We decided to take the train instead of driving. I stayed awake all night, looking out the window. I had never been farther away from home than Indiana. The thought that I was getting closer and closer to Elvis would not let me sleep.

It was a mail train and it made almost all the stops along the way. There were so many little towns. The trip took eleven hours.

When the train came to a stop at Memphis, the

first thing I did was get off and go inside the station and buy a newspaper. On the very front page was a picture of Elvis. It showed him getting on a train in this same station where I had just gotten off a train. Only a few hours before, Elvis had left Memphis to go to California to make a movie, *Jailhouse Rock.*

I put the paper down on the polished station bench where we were sitting and looked up at mother. I had not felt really tired until that moment. I felt crushed inside.

"We just missed him," I said, glancing down at his picture again. I got up. "Well, I'm not ready to get on the next train back to Chicago. Are you, mother?"

She shook her head.

We got a room at a small hotel near the river called Hotel Claridge. After we got a bite in their coffee shop we went out to the street and got a cab to take us to Elvis' home on Audubon which was about a block south of Audubon Park with its low rolling hills.

All I had thought about, on the train down to Memphis, was seeing Elvis again. Something in me now really hurt.

"This is his place," the cab driver said, pulling over to the curb.

There was no one hanging around on the sidewalk outside. We went on up to the front door and knocked.

Elvis' mother came to the door and spoke in a very friendly way. Mother told her why we were there. As she did, Elvis' father came to the door.

"You see," mother said, "my daughter met your son in Chicago and she brought a little gift for him. I know she's disappointed not to see Elvis. And I've heard so much about him from Arlene

that, frankly, I'm really disappointed, myself."

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Presley said, shaking her head. "And you just missed him by such a few hours. I feel real bad that you had to come all the way down here, like this, just to miss him."

I straightened the blue satin bow I had tied on the gift box I was carrying. "Mrs. Presley, would you see that Elvis gets this when he comes home?" I said.

She seemed so sweet. "I'll be sure be gets it and I thank you so much."

The gift box was taken up into the attic at Graceland and was left there, entirely forgotten, for a long time. One day, long after, when I was at Graceland, Elvis discovered it up there. It was a strange event.

Mrs. Presley put the box on a table and came back to the door. We talked quite a while.

"I'll be sure to tell Elvis that you folks came down," Mrs. Presley said when we walked back out to the street to the cab that was still waiting.

Riding back downtown to the hotel, mother said, "I don't know about Elvis but his daddy certainly is a very good looking man."

I smiled at her. We seemed a lot closer as we rode along.

"Do you really think Elvis will know that you gave him that sweater?" she asked.

"Maybe so," I said. "You know that picture they took of Elvis signing my autograph book at the concert?"

"The one that got you in trouble at school?" she said.

In fact, the woman who was principal at Von Steuben High School had been so unhappy when my picture appeared in the paper with Elvis that my parents finally had to take me out and enroll

me in a private school.

"That's the one," I said. "I put a copy of it inside that sweater. Maybe when Elvis opens it up and sees the picture, he will remember me."

Mother thought a while. "I wonder what he'll do?" she mused.

The next day, we took a cab down along the bank of the Mississippi River and then out to see the Graceland mansion Elvis had bought. Workmen were busy around the tall house and all over the grounds. It looked like a small army. The mansion was in an area called Whitehaven, a place of low hills covered with lots of gorgeous green trees. It was so beautiful, a house in the middle of a lovely woods, up on a hill, in lonely elegance with nothing else around it.

"I know now why Elvis loves this place," I said.

"So do I," mother said, wistfully. "Listen to the quiet."

Everybody in town seemed friendly. We met a family who invited us to visit their home off Southern Avenue that evening. They suggested that mother let me come back to Memphis during my summer vacation and stay with them. They had a daughter who was almost as big an Elvis fan as I was and we would have a lot in common.

"If Arlene wants to get a job and pay her own expenses, she can do that," said mother.

Within days after we got back home, I had a telephone sales job with Patricia Stevens. I wanted the job. I lied about my age to get it.

That summer I was back in Memphis. Nothing could have kept me away.

My girlfriend in Memphis met me at the train station. The very next afternoon, we went out to Graceland. When we walked up to the front gate, I

felt like I was coming home. I was clutching the picture under my arm, the one showing Elvis signing my autograph book.

Memphis in summer is hot. My girlfriend and I stood around the front gate for a long time. There must have been a hundred other fans milling around happily in the sunshine, all wondering if Elvis would come out. The guards said they didn't know if he would or not.

The sun turned slowly red as it got later in the afternoon. Somebody said the next bus that came along would be the last one going back into town. If we missed it, we'd be stuck there all night long unless we could hitch a ride or get my friend's folks to drive all the way out there and get us.

"We've got to be on that bus," she said.

When it came, we got on. My girlfriend slumped down in a seat by the open window and fanned her blouse. She looked out at all the kids waiting patiently around the gate.

"They'd better come on or they'll be stuck here all night," she said.

"I don't know," I said, uneasily taking a seat by her. "Maybe I should just stay out here with them."

She shook her head and fanned her blouse. "Not me."

The next day, there wasn't a cloud in the hot blue sky. The sun burned down. My girlfriend said she didn't want to stand out at the gate again all day.

Nothing was going to stop me. I had already waited too long. I collected my picture of Elvis and got my camera. I caught the bus and went back out to Graceland.

Fans were gathered at the gate — as they were at all hours of the day and night. They were talking

quietly and with great intensity about Elvis. They exchanged rumors about his next movie and his next tour, who he was dating, what car he was driving now and how he felt about things in general.

They were careful to keep an eye on the front of the house to make sure they would see him the second he came out.

A guy from Terre Haute, Indiana, got a lot of attention for one brief moment when he announced, "I saw someone up there around the barn, a little earlier. They were riding a horse. But it wasn't him."

A girl who sounded like she had known Elvis intimately all her life, said, "He's not even up, yet. He doesn't usually get out of bed until around four in the afternoon. I imagine he's still in bed asleep."

People nodded their heads and looked up at the house. Then they looked back at the girl, silently wondering who she might be to know so much.

The afternoon wore on. Something had to be done.

One of Elvis' young uncles, Travis Smith, was on duty at the front gate. He was sitting inside the brick guardhouse by a phone that connected with the house. From there he could keep an eye on the gate.

I strolled inside. They usually left the gate open and fans respected that situation. They were allowed to go up into Elvis' front yard as far as the first shade trees.

I strolled up to the guardhouse door and said, "Hi."

In a chatty way, I told Travis my situation. How I had met Elvis in Chicago. He smiled and nodded.

I told him how Elvis had said to be sure I came to see him if I ever got down to Memphis. Travis smiled again and nodded.

I showed him the picture taken by the news photographer of Elvis signing my autograph book.

"That one's me," I said.

"Why, that's nice," he said, and handed it back to me. "That's real nice. What did you say your name was?"

"Arlene. Arlene Cogan. From Chicago."

He nodded. "You like it up there?"

"The only thing we don't have in Chicago is Elvis Presley," I said. "But without Elvis . . ."

He laughed. Then he got up and sort of herded me out of the shack and locked the door. "I got to go up to the house for something," he said.

After a while he came back down the hill in his car. He stopped and went in the guard shack a few minutes and then came back out.

"Hi," I said.

He looked up from locking the door. "Oh, hi, there. Still waiting?"

"Are you kidding?"

He smiled. "Well, I got to take some of Elvis' clothes down to the cleaners to get them ready for a tour or something." He opened the door to his car and then looked back. "Jump in with me and you can ride down to the cleaners and back with me. If you want to."

If I want to?

When I slid into the car seat on the other side, I felt like I had just been handed some kind of magic passport that nobody else at the gate had been able to get. They all looked at me as we drove out between them and turned down the street. They had that hungry look in their eyes that I knew so well.

I put my press conference picture and camera down in the seat between us.

Travis glanced down at the picture. "You want me to show Elvis that picture when I get back?" he said.

"Oh, would you?" I said.

"Yeah," Travis said, pulling away from a stop sign. "You better put a little note with it so he'll know what it is. I might not get it right."

I looked at the pile of Elvis' clothes in the back seat. All the magical colors. The pockets that held his things. A smudge on a knee he got some way. I kept myself from reaching into the back seat to touch them.

"He'll most likely be up and having breakfast by the time we get back," Travis said. "It'll be a good time to catch him."

He looked at me and smiled. "Chicago, eh? I thought you sounded like you were from up there somewhere. The way you say some of the words."

"What do you think I should put in the note?" I said.

He shrugged. "You know that better than I do. Just make it short. I'll put it in with your picture by his plate in the kitchen. It'll be there when he comes downstairs to eat in a few minutes." He looked at his watch.

When we got back from the cleaners, Travis waited outside, talking to the fans at the gate, while I sat in the guard shack and tried to think of what to write to Elvis Presley.

Everything I started to write seemed stiff. Nothing came out right.

I wrote blindly and folded the paper and went out and handed it to Travis. He took it and my picture and headed up the driveway to the front door.

The note had said, "Dear Elvis, I would appreciate it very much if I could see you for a few minutes." I had signed my full name.

I sat there in the guard house for what seemed close to the end of time. Sometimes I looked up at the phone on the wall that was connected to the house. I wanted to pick it up and just hold on and listen.

What had happened up there? Did Travis forget to leave the note on the breakfast table? Did Elvis even bother to read it? Did one of the maids accidentally throw it in a trash can while she was cleaning up? Were they looking at my picture and having a big laugh?

I groaned aloud, "Oh, God." I forgot to say "Chicago" in the note!

I looked up. Travis was standing in the guard-house door. He came on in and sat down. He handed me back my picture.

"Did he say anything?" I said.

He shook his head. "Naw. He just signed his name."

I looked at the picture again. Something about it seemed strange. Elvis' signature was on the far left side of the picture. Never before had I seen any of Elvis' autographs on that side of a picture. Always he had autographed the right side of a picture.

Then I noticed something else. Elvis had written his name right across *me*. I kept staring at Elvis' name. Was he trying to tell me something? Was he saying, "See, I remember you. I know who you are."

"Mr. Smith," I said. "Did Elvis happen to ask you which girl I was in the picture?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Well, thanks very much," I said.

"You're welcome, honey," he said. "Say hello to Chicago for us when you get back home."

"I will," I said. It hurt, saying that. It was like saying my goodbye and I didn't want to.

I stayed there where I was. This one autograph couldn't be the end. I clung to my seat in the guardhouse and waited for something to happen.

About an hour passed. Then one of Elvis' cousins, Billy Smith, came riding down the winding drive from the mansion on a motor scooter.

He spoke to his father, Travis, and then said something to the crowd. The fans gathered in front of him. He was saying something I couldn't hear. I walked outside and asked, "What did you say?"

Billy said, "You must be the girl from Chicago."

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"Come on," Billy said. "Jump on the back of this thing." His eyes were big and warm and as friendly as his smile. "Elvis sent me down here to get you."

I heard one of the girls on the other side of the wall gasp. "God, she's getting to go up there!"

When I got on behind Billy, he gunned the engine and up the hill we scooted.

"Hold onto my shoulders," he yelled.

The ride up the hill toward the big white house seemed like some kind of dream. Elvis had sent for me!

At the gate. . .

Arlene waits.

CHAPTER 2

"Goodnight, Honey."

Billy guided his scooter up and around to the back of the house. I saw Elvis' father standing there. He came over and helped me get off the scooter.

"Hi, honey," he said. "Your mother didn't come this time?"

"You remember?"

He nodded. "Yeah. You had a box of something for Elvis."

"I am amazed," I said.

There were a few other people standing around. They looked up and got sort of alert and smiling when Elvis came strolling out of the house.

Elvis spotted me at once and came over to see me. He kissed me on the cheek and hugged me.

"Well, you finally made it to Memphis," he said.

I looked up at him, unable to speak.

He put an affectionate arm around my shoulder. He felt how tense I was and he grinned. "Is that you shaking or is it me?" He laughed. "Remember that? Come on, darlin'."

"Goodnight, Honey."

They were all strangers on the hill. But with Elvis' arm around my shoulder, I felt safe and secure. Elvis always made you feel good about yourself in a special way he had.

We sat down in lawn chairs on the edge of the grass. I looked around for a moment and then quickly back at Elvis. There was absolutely no one, or no thing, that I wanted to look at more than him.

Everyone else out there — mostly family and a couple of guys who worked for him, I learned later — kept glancing around at Elvis, too. They didn't want to miss something.

Elvis asked about my fan club in Chicago.

"How long have you been meeting?" he said.

"Ever since we heard about you," I said.

He laughed. "That's great, honey." He leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. "Daddy saw your picture, the one you sent up with Uncle Travis. He said you were up here before with your mother. He said your mother was a real pretty woman."

I nodded.

"I'm sorry I had to miss you," he said. He sounded like he truly meant it. I could not believe that someone as big as Elvis Presley could possibly be interested in someone as small as me.

His people began to gather about him. The guys wanted to talk mostly about things that had happened to them on the road. They loved being on the road, it seemed. But some of the stories were really wild. Elvis would look over at me and say, "Don't pay any attention to any of this. They're a bunch of con artists." But he got as much fun out of the stories as all the others. I loved his laughter.

At moments, I would remember back in Chicago, sitting in the back booth of the drugstore down the street from high school, talking with the kids about what Elvis Presley was really like. It seemed incredible that I was getting to sit for at least an hour with him and the guys and listen to all the stories and the wonderful Elvis humor — right there with Elvis himself.

Elvis' mother and father went indoors and in a few minutes Elvis got up and took my hands in his. He led me out toward the barn. He talked about all his animals. He seemed to love all living things without much reservation. There were dogs. There were chickens wandering around. Some horses. There were two little mules watching us with their big eyes as we walked by.

Seeing the horses made me remember the big chestnut mare named Spice that I rode every weekend when I was nine years old.

"Do you ride much?" I said.

"Not much," he said. "Daddy is the one who fools with horses."

His holding my hand was all I could think about.

Then my time ran out.

I was walking along the side of the house with him. I could see that we were heading around to the front. I would soon be told goodbye and be sent back down to the gate. Like a bad dream, I could see myself leaving his house and never seeing him again.

"God, don't let this be the last time," I prayed.

I wasn't brassy enough to ask him if I could come back to see him again. But what could I do?

I repeated the short prayer.

Elvis noticed the camera still dangling by my side.

Relaxing.

"Aw, honey," he said, stopping. "I didn't notice you had a camera. Did you want some pictures? Why didn't you say something?"

"I really forgot the camera," I said. "It never crossed my mind after I got up here."

He looked at the late sunlight pouring into the top of the tall trees around the house.

"The sun's almost gone," he said. "Look, why don't you come back tomorrow? I'll make sure you get all the pictures you want. I'll promise to try to get up a little earlier tomorrow so you'll have enough sunlight."

"I hate to ask you to do that," I said.

He shrugged. "It's allright. I . . . I . . . "

There was that little stutter in his voice that had taken me so by surprise while we were all sitting out behind the house talking about life on the road. Elvis was always nervous, in a way. Sometimes his voice would trip over itself when he started to say something.

"I . . . I sort of changed over to night life, back when I first started out on the tours. I did my show at night and it would take me a while to wind down after I got off the stage. And I did my travelling between shows during the night. That meant I had to get my sleep during the daytime — or I wouldn't get any."

He bent down and kissed me goodbye. "See you tomorrow."

He turned and walked back around the side of the house. I could hear the sound of the jukebox still playing across the empty patio.

When I came back the next day, Elvis had left word at the gate with his Uncle Travis to let me through.

Travis smiled with those nice eyes and said,

"Elvis told me to tell you just to come on up there, as soon as you got here."

One of the gate fans sidled up to me and said, confidentially, "You a friend of the family?"

"Not really," I said. I wished I could give him some little bit of information but I didn't feel free to say anything.

He frowned in thought. "Elvis asked you to come up?"

"Yeah."

"How come?" he said.

"He said it was so I could get some pictures," I said.

I walked up the winding driveway and around to the back. I could hear voices in the rear. Sitting behind the house were Elvis' mother and father and a couple of other people.

Elvis spotted me the moment I came into view. He was always quick to see any change around him. The others looked around at me, wondering what he had taken an interest in.

"Hi, honey," Elvis said. He came to meet me and the first thing he did was hug and kiss me. Affection was something he loved to show. He seemed to want to give it — and to crave it right back from you. In large amounts and often. He loved to touch and be touched.

"Let's don't forget this," he said, slipping the camera off my arm. "Let's get some shots while the sun is still up."

He slid down into one of the lawn chairs on the grass and opened his collar a little and smiled at me. It could have been a pose for a movie poster. He seemed to have a way of looking great, no matter how he stood or sat.

He was so beautiful I could hardly operate my camera. I looked at him through the view finder.

My hands shook so bad I thought I might drop the camera.

I started pressing the button and winding the film. Shooting and winding. Shooting and winding.

Elvis started joking with his father while I was taking the pictures.

I ended up with a roll of twelve pictures, all shot from the exact same spot.

Elvis got up and came over. "Get what you wanted?" he said.

"I'm afraid I got all the same thing," I said.

"Maybe one of them will turn out for you," he said.

He took my hand and we walked over to the patio. "We spend a lot of time out here," he said. "We've put a jukebox over there so you can dance or just sit and listen, which is what I do, mostly."

He smiled. "I'm not all that good a dancer."

In my mind, I could see him moving again on the stage of the International Amphitheater in Chicago. His moves were what made the music behind him so moving. Yet, he said he couldn't dance very good!

The golden light from the late sun shone like shimmering bronze on the water in the swimming pool.

"You know, honey," he said, "the prettiest thing about you are your brown eyes. And the funny thing, I could actually *feel* them on me sometimes when we were sitting around the other day, talking to the guys."

I looked up at him. The thought was so strong in my mind that I almost heard it aloud: *"I want to stay here."*

We were walking back toward where he had said goodbye to me the previous day.

"Well, tell the fans in your club hello from me when you get back home," he said. He bent down and kissed me. I could see the fans down at the gate staring at us. Then Elvis lifted his hand in a little sign of farewell and said, "Come see us again."

I just stood there, twisting the strap on my camera.

"Elvis, I want to thank you for letting me come back again and get all the pictures of you," I said.

"It's okay, honey."

I watched him walk back around the house. I started down the driveway toward the gate on legs that felt as hollow and weak as soda straws.

"Honey."

I heard him call me. I looked back. He was walking down the drive after me.

"Darlin', I'm having a little party tomorrow night," he said. "I'd really love to have you come."

He stood waiting, as if he didn't really know for sure what I would say. That gave me a strange feeling, an odd sense of concern for him. He seemed to have no conceit at all — no real idea of who he was.

"I'd love to come," I said.

He smiled and it was the most beautiful smile I had ever seen on any man.

"That's good," he said. "That's good." He hugged me and said, "I'll see you later."

He turned and walked back up the driveway with that unmistakable walk of his.

I lay awake all night.

The day was like a piece of film. I ran it over and over again, remembering every single thing that had happened that day on the hill.

How soft and beautifully smooth his hair was.

His hands, how they had a hypnotic way of moving. Ears of a classic bit of statuary, lying back flat against his head. Teeth white and perfect.

He was so different — in his walk, his laughter, his ways.

"He asked me to come back," I whispered to the dark.

On the train, coming down from Chicago, I had told myself that if I could just meet him one more time, I would be satisfied for all time.

Now I knew Chicago was no longer my home. I would never be the same again.

When I walked back up the driveway to Elvis' house that evening, I was wearing a borrowed dress. It was gray with little blue flowers.

There was a huge guy standing out in the front yard near the door. He was introduced to me later by Elvis as Lamar Fike. He seemed to always want to go out of his way to be helpful to Elvis and to anyone Elvis was talking to.

Lamar directed me on around to the back of the house.

Twenty people or more were standing around the pool, talking and looking happy to be there. There were some outdoor lights and the water in the pool was glowing with a kind of rippling blue-green that sent a beautiful radiance up into the night.

Music was coming from the jukebox and a couple of girls stood beside it talking.

People looked around at me curiously as I walked up. I wondered what they must think of this kid from Chicago who came in a borrowed dress with little flowers in it.

I put on a bright smile for everyone and tried to be serene.

I stopped at the end of the pool. Across on the

other side, Elvis stood in the middle of a group of guys. They were all laughing at something someone had just said. Over it all, you could hear Elvis laughing. His laughter was special. I had never heard anyone laugh with the innocent joy I heard in his voice. It tickled you just to hear it.

He was beautifully dressed in black pants topped by a white sports jacket.

Everyone seemed to watch him. He had the same magnetism here at home that he had in front of a big audience.

Then I saw something hard for me to believe about Elvis. Elvis looked up at me just as I stared. He had a long tipped thin cigar between his slender fingers. Not one of the magazine stories I had ever read about him said that Elvis smoked anything, much less a cigar.

Elvis looked at me with a puzzled expression that he would explain to me later that night. Then he strolled away to join another group. One of the girls in the new group slipped her arm under his. People turned to him naturally. Everything he did was spellbinding.

Elvis started singing along with one of the records that dropped onto the jukebox turntable, "From A Jack To A King." No one could ever be able to tell their people back home how it was to stand and listen to him strolling around a pool, singing a song.

It was like a scene from a movie — and I was in it. Who would ever believe a thing like that back in Chicago?

Elvis was making his way around the pool toward me. He hugged and kissed the women along the way. He loved to show his feelings and he loved to have it come back to him. When he got to me he hugged and kissed me and said, "Hi,

honey. Come meet some of these people."

He slid a hand under my elbow and walked me around the pool to where an outdoor firepit glowed and a pile of marshmallows sat on a paper plate beside it. He slipped marshmallows on a stick and handed them to a guy who walked up. "Do a couple for us, Alan," Elvis said. "Meet Arlene. This is Alan Fortas."

Alan was a sturdy looking guy who looked like he had things under control. He later ran Elvis' ranch as foreman and Elvis nicknamed him "Hog Ears."

We walked around the pool to where a couple of girls sat on a glider. They looked up at Elvis when he stopped in front of them with me. They couldn't have been any older than I was.

"Here are a couple of girls I want you to meet," Elvis said.

They both got up and Elvis put an arm around each of their shoulders. He kissed each one with affection as he introduced them to me.

There was Frances Forbes, a slender girl even shorter than me. She was no more than five, one. She had dark eyes and hair and she was really cute. She reached up with one hand and held onto Elvis' hand draped around her shoulder and wouldn't let go. There was Heidi Heise. She was blond and about as tall as me. She had a very direct look in her eyes when she spoke to me.

They both seemed so confident of themselves, in their own way.

"Honey," Elvis said, "stay here and get acquainted with these two. And make yourself at home."

He walked off, striding with that sensuous walk that seemed to be as normal to him around the house as it did on stage.

"Goodnight, Honey."

"Isn't he gorgeous tonight?" said Heidi, smiling when I turned back to them. She had seen the look in my eyes.

"He always is," said Frances, archly. "What do you mean, 'tonight?' "

I was almost afraid to say anything. I just tried to smile in a knowing kind of way. I knew none of this was real, anyway. Somewhere a bell would sound and this would all change back into reality.

"I beg your pardon?" Heidi had said something to me.

"I was asking you if you belonged to one of the fan clubs in Chicago."

"I'm president of one," I said. "I came down here with my mother once before. Elvis wasn't here. His parents told us he had just gone out to California to make *Jailhouse Rock*."

Frances nodded. "I remember the day he left."

"I remember *every* day he left us," Heidi said.

"Let's don't," Frances said.

They talked along with each other, trying to include me, and they kept glancing around to keep an eye on Elvis. They had to know where he was and what he was doing.

Heidi rattled the ice in her glass again and a guy came out of the shadows and took her glass from her.

"Thanks, Cliff," said Heidi.

In a couple of minutes, Cliff came back and Elvis was with him.

Elvis took the glass from Cliff's hand, sipped it and handed it to Heidi.

"Arlene," Elvis said, "this guy is Cliff Gleaves. He's a very amusing person. He cracks you up. Cliff, this is Arlene from Chicago."

Cliff smiled and grabbed my right hand in his. "Hi, Arlene," he said in a big radio voice. "Let me

get you a Pepsi. It's the strongest thing you can find around this place."

He went over to the big picnic ice chest and dug through the ice.

Elvis looked across at the glowing jukebox lights. Someone had punched the song, "Without Love," one more time. It was getting a good play from this crowd.

"Hey, Lamar," Elvis called to Lamar Fike who stood with his back to us, talking to someone.

Lamar almost spun around, a look of anxious questioning in his eyes. "Yeah, Elvis?" He moved toward us with the strange grace that some very large people can achieve.

"Lamar, this is Arlene, a friend of mine from up in Chicago," Elvis said.

Lamar had dark circles around his anxious eyes. He looked oddly like Elvis' mother in this light.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Lamar asked hopefully.

"Help has already arrived, Lamar," said Cliff.

Lamar seemed to want to do something for me but he didn't know what it could be.

Elvis led me away, leaving Lamar standing there, sort of on his toes.

Elvis glanced back at the whole scene from the edge of the shadows. "I love being on the road and being with the fans," he said. "But I always look forward to being back home. I can't wait, sometimes."

We stopped at the edge of the pool and reflections played on his face as the song, "Without Love," came out of the jukebox another time.

"Does someone know you like that song?" I said.

He smiled. "I never try to dance the fast ones,"

he said. "But I can dance to the slow ones."

He led me over toward the jukebox and the next thing I knew, I was dancing with him. We were the only ones dancing.

Elvis bent over me a little and he rocked back and forth from one foot to another. His chin easily touched the top of my head.

"How tall are you, honey?" he said.

I pushed back and looked up at him. "Five, four and a half. You're six, one. Exactly."

He laughed. "How'd you know? My records say I'm just six feet."

I smiled, feeling comfortable with him. "I can just tell."

As we danced, Elvis said to me, "You know, this song is the story of my life."

Before I could answer, he gave a little turn at the end of the record and pulled me by one hand toward the girls in the glider, Frances and Heidi.

On the way over, he put out a hand and collared a dark skinned young man with curly black hair. "George, say hello to Arlene."

George Klein smiled. "Hello, Arlene."

He also had a mellow radio voice like Cliff had.

"George is a deejay down here," Elvis said. "We went to school together."

Elvis sort of steered me toward the girls and then he walked over to the jukebox and punched a number.

"How often do you two see Elvis?" I said.

"Oh, when he's home we're with him all the time," said Frances.

"My God," I said. "You are so lucky."

When I asked them about what it was like, being around Elvis all the time, they told me nothing about him as an entertainer — only as a person. Elvis the entertainer began to recede in my

mind and the man himself began to move forward. It was a kind of awakening.

I watched for him to come back but he did not. He had disappeared into the house.

I asked Heidi what time it was and she said it was about two in the morning.

Some people began drifting away.

"Isn't Elvis coming back out?" I said.

Frances looked upstairs at the dark windows. "We don't know."

Heidi looked at her watch. "Well, tomorrow is another school day for me," she said.

Frances put down her glass. "I've got to go, too."

"Jump in the limousine and I'll take y'all home," Lamar said.

Frances smiled at me. "Nice to meet you, Arlene. I hope we'll be seeing you again." There was a hint of a question in her voice.

"I sure hope so," I said.

The girls walked off together toward the mass of cars — eight of them plus one very long limousine.

I stood there alone for a while. I looked around for Elvis or someone who might be able to tell me what I was supposed to do next.

I walked over and joined Cliff standing by the pool.

"Has Elvis gone in for the night or do you think he will be back?" I said.

"I don't know," he said. "But don't leave just yet."

We walked over to the jukebox. "Have you been inside the house, yet?"

"Oh, no," I said, surprised at the question.

"It's gorgeous," Cliff said. He seemed determined to talk to me a while. "Elvis has it done

beautifully."

He swept a hand toward the tall building towering in the moonlight. "Would you like to go in and see for yourself?"

He smiled, making me feel so much at ease.

"Come on," he said, leading me around toward the front of the house. "It will feel like home in no time at all."

That was when I walked into Graceland.

It was as Cliff had told me. A strange feeling came over me that I actually belonged there. I could feel Elvis' presence the moment I walked through the front door. He seemed to be everywhere. I had never known a house that gave me such a feeling. There was a kind of warmth all around you.

"You see?" Cliff said, smiling.

We turned right and immediately into the big living room. I sat down on a couch. Another girl was already seated in the room. We smiled at each other.

Cliff sat down on a big white chair and began a nonstop monologue obviously meant to keep us entertained. Cliff told me he had been a deejay on a small radio station outside of Memphis.

Suddenly, he stopped talking and looked up at the stairway.

Elvis was coming softly down the stairs. He had changed clothes from the black slacks and white jacket that he had been wearing on the patio. He had on brown pants and sweater and he moved like a dream. As he passed a mirror I saw him glance at himself and check himself out quickly. He was chewing gum.

He came on into the living room and walked around the coffee table in front of me and sat down on the couch and laid his head in my lap. He

looked up at me. The beautiful dark blue eyes studied me soberly. Such long eyelashes!

At that moment, I would not have traded places with any woman in the world. Elvis with his head in my lap — I wanted this never to end. I sat as quietly as I could.

Then I heard him asking, "Honey, how long do you plan to be in Memphis?"

More than anything else, I wanted him to think of me as a lady and not some little silly girl who was making a big fool of herself. I wanted to control the thing that was going on inside of me so I would make a good impression on Elvis.

"I plan to stay as long as I can," I said.

"Do you like Chicago?" he said.

"The winters are a little too cold for me," I said. "The wind off the lake is horrible. And all the snow we get."

He smiled. "Like it down here?"

"I love it down here," I said. That was true.

Cliff and Elvis began teasing me about my "Chicago accent." Elvis got a kick out of the way I had said some words, earlier on the patio.

"Honey, show Cliff how you say poem," Elvis said.

"You mean, *pome*?" I said.

He laughed. "Yeah. And what was the other one? Oh, yeah. Show Cliff how you say roof."

"I say *ruff*," I said. "How do you say it?"

"It's *roof*, honey. *Roof*."

He took my hand and placed it, my palm facing his, to see how big it was. His hand was so slender.

"One other question, darlin'," he said, sitting up. "After you go back home, when's the next time you plan to be back down here?"

"As soon as I can," I said.

"Goodnight, Honey."

I hadn't moved a muscle since he had put his head in my lap. I took a deep breath for the first time.

Elvis got up and stretched. He looked at the other girl for the first time. "Would you like to look around the house?" he asked her.

They walked out together.

Almost immediately, Cliff began a long and involved story about something that had happened to him once in radio. Every once in a while, he would interrupt himself to ask if he could get me anything from the kitchen — a sandwich or a drink. Then he'd go sailing on with his story.

Then he was asking me about my school in Chicago. He got a kick out of me telling about how we would get together after school at the drugstore.

He made me feel so much at ease. I didn't even realize he had slowly got me to do all the talking.

At one point, I said, "Cliff, I don't think I could ever just go back to Chicago and forget everything that has happened to me in Memphis."

"I know how you feel," he said. "We're all that way."

After a while, he got up and said, "Arlene, how would you like to go upstairs and wait in Elvis' sitting room with me a while?"

I began to feel a little concerned. What I wanted to do, more than anything, was say goodnight to Elvis and thank him for inviting me. What if I didn't see him again that night? Would there be another time? Would it all be over?

Cliff was already several steps up the stairway. He stopped and looked back down at me. Then it dawned on him what was going through my mind.

"Aw, Arlene, don't worry so much," he said.

"Elvis is not going to jump out at you from behind some door. He doesn't do that sort of thing. Nobody here is going to hurt you. So, just relax and enjoy yourself."

He held out a hand.

"After all, that's what you came to Memphis for, isn't it? Sure, it is. So, come along with your Old Uncle Cliff."

He made me feel better — and a little foolish. I started up the stairs behind him.

The sitting room was right next to Elvis' bedroom. Later on, Elvis used that room for his office. It had a big television set and there was a phone. Comfortable chairs and a couch. It was another comfortable room and just beautiful.

Cliff settled down in the most comfortable looking chair and said, "The whole house adds up to one word and that word is *spectacular*."

Then my eyes landed on the clock. "Oh, my God," I said.

"What's wrong?" Cliff said.

"I had no idea, Cliff, that it was four o'clock."

He shrugged. "Around Graceland, the day is just going good. Don't worry. We're on the night shift with Elvis."

He settled down deeper in his chair and crossed his ankles. The heels of his polished boots disappeared in the deep rug. He looked like he had already made all his lifestyle adjustments for living around Elvis. Cliff looked as if he felt very much at home.

"Cliff?"

"Yeah?"

"Where did Elvis go?" I said.

"We'll look him up, in a minute," Cliff said.

About that time, the door to the connecting hallway opened and the girl who had left with

Elvis came in. She sat down on the other end of the couch I was on.

She looked at me and said, "Elvis wants to see you."

I laughed. "Sure he does. Sure."

She shook her head. "I'm serious. He told me to tell you to come on in. He's in the bedroom, down that hall. The next door. You *are* Arlene, aren't you?"

"You *are* joking, aren't you?" I said.

"Hey," she said, "you better get on in there."

Cliff nodded. "Go ahead. It's okay."

I sat there looking at the two of them a minute and then I said, "If you guys are pulling my leg and I go knock on his door at this hour and he really *didn't* want to see me, I'll be embarrassed to death."

The girl said, "Honest. He wants to see you."

"Go on," Cliff said.

I went out of the sitting room and down the hall to the next room which they had said was Elvis' bedroom.

I stood there a minute. Then I knocked.

"Who is it?" Elvis asked from inside.

"It's Arlene."

"Come on in, honey," he said.

I opened the door.

Elvis was sitting propped up by giant pillows on the biggest bed I ever saw before or after. There was a smoked glass mirror behind him on the wall. He put his hand on the side of the bed and told me to come sit by him.

"Don't be so nervous, honey," he said. "You don't have any reason to be afraid of anyone in this house. Come sit down with me."

It was a beautiful bedroom. The floor was knee deep in white carpet. The walls were midnight

blue. Lights glowed indirectly. In one corner was a big white chair. The windows were all draped in deep blue and the drapery was heavy and lovely.

There was a big bolster on the floor. I had to step over it. I halted a few steps away from his side of the bed and he patted it again. "Come and sit down."

He was the most gorgeous human I had ever seen. He had on no shirt and the blanket came up to his waist. I couldn't go any closer. It seemed unreal.

"Honey," he said, "the last thing I'll ever do is hurt you. Come sit down by me. Okay?" He held out his hand to me. On one finger was a big diamond horseshoe ring.

I walked over to the edge of the huge bed and sat down on the very edge of it. I silently waited.

"Look, sweetheart," he said, "if you stay around me much you'll learn you don't have to be nervous or scared of me. I don't want you feeling that way. There's no need. You understand?"

He studied me for another long minute.

He seemed to be trying to decide how to say something. How to say it right.

The sound of music from a radio station played softly. Elvis would never turn off the music in his bedroom.

He sighed.

"Arlene, there is something I have to get straight with you.

"When we were all out on the patio tonight, every time I'd say any kind of rough word at all, I'd look up and you'd have this shocked look on your face.

"Honey, what you've got to realize is that I'm a human being just like everybody else. I want you to treat me like you would anyone else.

"And the way you looked at my cigar. Now, I don't drink but I do smoke a cigar once in a while. I even say a cuss word at times but they're mostly said in fun. I don't say them *at* anybody.

"I'm human. I want you to realize that."

He reached out and took my hands.

"Love me," he said, "but don't worship me. I'm not a god."

After a minute, he said, "If I didn't care about you in a special way I would not waste my time talking to you like this. But I care. I like you. I want you to be one of my gang."

"Your gang?" I said. "You mean, like Frances and Heidi?"

He nodded.

"Whenever I'm home, I want you to be here," he said. "From now on."

He pulled me to him and put his arms around me gently. He kissed me.

He lifted my chin and I looked at him.

"I have to leave on tour in four days," he said softly. "I want you to stay here until I have to go."

He held me.

"I want you to feel like this is your home, not just mine," he said. "You don't need to explain to anyone why you're here.

"But if you want to call home and talk to your folks, use the phones here. They're yours. You don't have to ask me first, just go ahead and call your folks so they don't worry about you. Do that later today.

"And if you have any kind of problem, feel free to come to me with it. Don't listen to the guys if they say not to bother me with something. Just come and talk to me.

"If you just feel like coming up here and sitting alone for a while, come ahead. No room in my

house is off limits to anybody in my gang.

"That's the way I want you to think about it now."

He settled back on his pillow and smiled at me. He shut his eyes and yawned. He punched his pillow again and then poked one of the buttons on his bedside intercom system. It rang the phone downstairs in the livingroom where Cliff was now sitting.

"Cliff, you better take the girls home," he said, then hung up the phone.

He turned the lights down a little more and then said, "Goodnight, honey. See you later." He smiled. "I never will say goodbye."

As I stepped out into the hall and looked back, his bedroom was already dark.

I walked down the hallway and down the stairs and I couldn't feel my feet touching a thing. I was already back up there on my private little cloud, the one that Elvis had tried to bring me down from — but God, who could help it?

The other girl met me at the bottom of the stairs and we went out the front door to the line of cars in the front drive. We got into the long limousine and Cliff pulled away quietly from the house and down the curving drive. I looked out the back window at the front of the big white house. The tall pillars stood like sentries on either side of the door.

The house stood backlighted by a pink dawn in the east.

The guard waved at Cliff as we eased through the gate and the band of wide-eyed fans on the night watch.

Cliff turned the limousine north.

"Elvis said we might go swimming this evening," he said. "Bring your bathing suit."

I felt my life changing faster than I would be able to keep up with. I closed my eyes and said another prayer.

Why was this happening to me, I wondered. How incredibly lucky I felt — and how blessed.

I could hardly wait for tomorrow to see him again.

CHAPTER 3

"When I marry . . ."

The next evening when I arrived at the front gate, the night guard called up to the house and then told me to go on up. I planned to be there for all four evenings before Elvis left on tour — as he had asked.

When I knocked on the front door, Elvis' mother answered. She smiled and said, "Hello, Arlene. Come in. I'm glad to see you again. Are you doing alright?"

"I'm doing just fine, Mrs. Presley," I said. "Have the other girls arrived yet?"

She said Elvis was upstairs and the girls were out on the patio.

"They've already got their swim suits on," she said. "Use my room to get into yours, if you like."

After changing, I found Frances and Heidi standing at the jukebox.

I was full of questions, trying to find out everything I could about what was going on so I would find it easier to fall into place.

I asked them how they first met Elvis.

"I stayed after school one day," said Frances.

"At Cherokee Elementary. Afterwards, I was walking home. Elvis came driving by in a funny looking little Messerschmitt car. He smiled at me. He had such a beautiful face. My head turned all the way around when he went by.

"I was thirteen — the magic age. I still played with dolls."

She smiled.

"Then I turned fourteen. I guess I just changed dolls. I started riding my bicycle over to Elvis' house on Audubon. That's where I met Heidi. She was already hanging around the front. We'd talk on the phone at night after we went home. She lived all the way across Memphis from me but sometimes her mother would bring her over to spend the night at my house. We kept wondering how we would ever manage to get to know Elvis."

Heidi's blue eyes danced in the jukebox glow. "We were determined to meet him. And determination can take a girl a long way."

I looked at the different people around the patio. None of the girls were what would be called movie starlet types. The guys were not what you would call matinee idols. But they all seemed to have one thing in common. They seemed to be in tune with the ways of Elvis.

"It was a kind of chain thing, I guess," said Heidi. "What happened was, I finally met a girl who already knew Elvis. She belonged to an Elvis Presley fan club that Colonel Parker had just started. The club drove around town in an old white Ford.

"Elvis called them his 'old white Ford gang.' "

Elvis still had not come downstairs. We all just waited on the patio.

"I guess a lot of girls get to come up here," I said.

Frances said, "And a lot never get to come back." She looked at Heidi with a question in her face. "Probably the biggest mistake girls make is to sleep with the guys who work around Elvis."

Heidi nodded. "We never do that."

"Girls *will talk*," Frances explained.

"The girls you see coming back are all virgins," she said. "Elvis is proud of that.

"What we do up here is mostly listen to the jukebox, dance and listen to the cracks the guys make. Naturally, Elvis is always the center of our attention — even when he's *not* here."

I looked out at the barn. "Do you ever ride the horses?"

Frances watched a Debbie Reynolds record drop into place and the needle come down. "Not these horses," she said. "They're mean and they're fat. One is named Diamond. I don't remember what the other one is called.

"They are hardly ever ridden. Elvis' daddy sometimes tries. He keeps telling me not to try to ride either one.

"But I decided to try Diamond anyway. He wouldn't guide right. Miss Minnie, Elvis' Grandma, has that clothesline over there. Diamond ran me straight into it. It nearly took off my head."

I said something about all the chickens I had seen.

"Miss Minnie likes to feed them," Frances said. "I keep *away* from them. A big old rooster attacked me and nearly took my leg off when I was a child.

"But every morning, those chickens line up and walk up to the house to get fed. Elvis likes to stand out here and watch them."

We strolled back to the glider near the big tree standing alone in back.

There were screams from the rooftop. I jumped.

"That's the two peacocks," Heidi said. "You'll get used to that. They sit up there mostly. And Elvis' mother has a white poodle named Duke. Then there's the Siamese cat named Wendell Corey — for the Hollywood actor. And wait until you see Elvis' myna bird. He's really something else. They keep him in the kitchen in a big cage on the counter by the telephone."

The girls sat down in the glider. Heidi glanced at her watch and said, "Is he alone?"

Frances nodded. "Alberta said he was."

"Wonder if he's in a good mood," Heidi said.

"Alberta said he is," Frances said.

After a minute, she said, "One night, a girl came up here for a party. Elvis came down and sat down by me.

"'What do you think of the new girl?' " he said. I just shrugged.

"Elvis watched her a minute and said, 'She's going to say something about my clothes.'

"He has a peculiar way of knowing what you're going to say, sometimes. Like he can read your mind.

"Sure enough, in another minute we heard this girl say something about Elvis' clothes.

"Elvis jumped up as if he had been hit. He ran over to where she was and started laying her out. He said, 'Look, if you don't like what I wear, you can walk back down the hill.'

"She came right back at him with something smart. They walked off toward the house, yelling at each other.

"We didn't see them for quite a while but when they did come back out it was obvious to

everyone that they had gotten over their hard feelings. They acted real close. It was obvious that Elvis really liked the girl.

"Sometimes it looks like a girl could make it with him if she stood up to him.

"One night a new girl came. We were back in the kitchen, talking and joking.

"Elvis used the water faucet and asked the girl to turn it off for him. 'Turn it off, yourself,' she said.

"Elvis asked her again to turn it off.

"She made an ugly face at him and didn't budge.

"They got into one of the worst shouting matches you ever saw. Elvis jumped up out of his seat by me and blessed her out from one end of the kitchen to the other, with her giving it right back to him. It was a knockdown battle.

"But before the evening was over and we all went home, he was sitting with her.

"The next thing we knew, he was dating her!"

Something suddenly entered Heidi's eyes. I saw it and my skin began to tingle. I felt something behind me.

"Did you call your folks today, Arlene?" Elvis asked as I turned.

I shook my head. "Should I?"

He looked at me as if I had done something that put him out, in a mild way.

"Go call them," he said. "Let them know what you're doing. Tell them you're alright. Parents want to know and it's not going to cost you anything to tell them. Go call your folks. Go on, now."

"Well, maybe I should," I said.

He kissed my cheek.

I went in the house and someone pointed out the phone in the kitchen. I told the operator who I

wanted to talk to.

Mother came on the line in Chicago. "Hello," she said.

"Mom," I said, "guess where I am?"

"Where is that, honey?" she said.

"Sit down," I said. "You're not going to believe this."

After a pause, she said, "Have you seen Elvis?"

"I'm calling from his kitchen," I said. "He said to use the phone."

"Are you alright, Arlene?" she said.

I tried to explain.

I went back outside after we hung up.

Elvis had come downstairs. He seemed depressed and a little on the blue side. Everyone was trying to be a little more cheerful around him than usual. He did not want to leave everyone and go off on the tour.

"I'll sure miss you guys," he said.

The jukebox was going strong. The charcoal pit glowed. Marshmallows were piled on a plate, waiting. Elvis kept playing the "Stardust" record. Couples danced and kidded each other. All of us were in our swim suits. Elvis looked so great.

Someone said something about how beautiful the blue water looked in the lighted pool. Elvis heard them, laughed and shoved them tumbling into the water.

There were yells and people ducking and shoving and then everybody was going into the pool.

Someone shoved Elvis from behind and he sailed head first into a threshing mass of people trying to get out.

Elvis climbed out and sat on the edge, laughing with as much delight as the rest of us.

Then we all went off to different places to get ourselves dry and put on some dry clothes.

Heidi and Frances took me upstairs. We went into one of the bathrooms they called the dressing room. It had a huge vanity in it and a mirror. I got my clothes from downstairs and came back up.

We were trying to dry our hair on towels and get some of the curl back in it. Nobody had any hair curlers with them, of course. We took big thick pieces of toilet paper and wadded them up and rolled our hair around them.

Elvis was right down the hall in his own dressing room. We heard him turn on a hair dryer.

"I wonder if we could ask him to borrow it?" Heidi said.

Frances put her hands on her hips and said, "Why not?"

The door opened. Elvis walked in, his hair wet and down in his face. He was carrying the hair dryer. A towel around his waist.

"Will somebody in here dry my hair?" he said.

He sat down at the mirror. Heidi plugged it in and began blowing his hair.

Elvis watched in the mirror and kept saying, "Blow it more over here . . ." and "Blow it some more in the back . . ." and "Do it longer down here . . ."

In a few minutes, Elvis stood up and glanced sidelong at himself in the mirror and said, "Thanks, darlin'. See y'all downstairs."

He went out and Heidi's mouth dropped a mile. "Oh, wow. I can't believe that."

Frances took the hair dryer.

"He was so *cute*," said Heidi. "I mean, coming in here like he was just one of the girls. In here with us, getting fixed up after a swim and it was no big deal."

She shook her head. "His hair is so *soft*." She sank into a soft chair. "Oh, I was all *thumbs*," she moaned.

She looked up at Frances. "Did you ever believe we'd get *this* close, Frances?"

"You mean, you two haven't known him that long?" I said.

"Not like this," said Heidi, looking around the dressing room. "Oh, I'd see him over on Audubon. I hung out on the sidewalk in front. He'd come out and hug and kiss on everyone and sign autographs and then take off. That's as close as I ever got."

"How'd you get to know him as well as this?" I said.

"Frances and I met a girl named Jimmi out at Audubon," Heidi said. "Jimmi had a cousin named Mack Gurley. He was a good looking guy. He drove a big car and worked in the control tower at the airport. Anytime we asked Mack, he would drive us out on Audubon and come back and pick us up later so we had a way home."

She flipped her fingers through her blond hair to dry it.

"One night after Elvis moved to Graceland, here, we were down at the gate. Frances and I were there together. Elvis came down to talk to the fans.

"I saw him walking through the dark and I said, 'Hi, Elvis.'

"He said, 'Is that you, Heidi?' He jumped over the gate. He really did. He jumped over it and came over and hugged and kissed on us. Elvis is really friendly. You'll see. Unless you're kind'a weird, he likes you. If you really like him then he likes you right back. At least, I think that's the way it happens."

I said I was amazed to know that Elvis could jump over the gate down front. "That's quite a jump," I said.

"Mack says he was playing pool with Elvis one day and he saw Elvis balance a pool ball on his cue stick and roll the ball down the side without it falling off," Heidi said.

"Anyway, he hung around with me and Frances down at the gate for half an hour before he got on a motorcycle and roared off down the street."

Frances gave her hair a final hot air blast from the dryer and handed it to Heidi. "I'll be across in the sitting room," she said.

I asked Heidi if her folks didn't mind her being out late.

She smiled. "They don't even know I'm out of bed."

She said her father was a doctor and they lived in a two-story brick home with lots of big trees all around it. Her bedroom was on the ground floor on the front side. Her parents' bedroom was next to hers but facing the back lawn.

"My window is easy to climb out of," she said with a wink.

"Mother is so protective," she said. "All my girlfriends can go out, even if we're all still in the seventh or eighth grade at White Station School.

"She's also a very sound sleeper. When I have some big plans for the night, I tell her, 'Night, night' and I shut my bedroom door. Many nights I pace back and forth in my bedroom, saying under my breath, *'Mother, go to bed! Go to bed!'*

"I always arrange a time when someone is going to come by and pick me up. It's not always Elvis. Sometimes it's one of his guys or a girl.

"I usually know when mother plans to go to

bed. So I can tell them when to come get me. If mother doesn't go to bed when she's supposed to, I panic. But I go on and raise my window and sneak out, even if mother is sitting reading in the den. I have to take my chances.

"I just have to remember to get back home and in bed before dawn."

Heidi finished with the hair dryer and started getting dressed in a blue dress with a white collar. She was so cute.

"When I know Elvis is going to come get me that night, I stay right by the window," she said. Her eyes were bright with excitement and pleasure. "If he pulls up in that limousine, it isn't right in front of the house. It's always a safe way down the street — but still in sight. He turns off his lights and waits for me in the dark.

"I go crawling out the window and running across the lawn to his limousine.

"Elvis thinks that is so funny. He likes to tell everybody about it when we get back to Graceland. He goes on about it for the next half hour.

"One night, when he brought me home, it was near sunrise. I said, 'Elvis, please, be *real* quiet.'

"He pulled that big limousine slowly down the street and stopped. As I was about to crawl in my bedroom window, he yelled at the top of his lungs, 'Good night, Heidi.' Everybody else in the limousine joined in and started yelling goodnight.

"I was mortified. I thought, 'My God, what if mother hears all this?'

"Fortunately, I've never been caught. If I ever am, I'll send mother out to the car to talk to Elvis."

She put a clip in her hair and studied herself in the mirror.

"I'm the *Midnight Skulker*," she said.

When we went downstairs we sort of began

looking around to see where Elvis was. There were a couple of people in the kitchen but they were drifting out — wondering where Elvis had gone. There were some people down in the pool room. You could hear pool balls clicking against each other. Someone passed us on the stairs as we went down. Elvis was not there. The players put up the sticks and followed us back upstairs.

We came upstairs into the front part of the house and we heard Elvis playing something quietly on the piano. He was singing. In the music room.

That was where everyone was gathering.

They were standing around him at this white piano, the one that also could be played as an organ. He was playing "Stardust." Frances said he played that song a lot.

He was playing by ear but he sounded much better than most people who had studied music all their life.

Elvis looked up at me as we came in and smiled. He began singing a ballad. I thought I recognized it. The words were supposed to go something like: "She came down the aisle, wearing a smile, a vision of happiness . . ."

Elvis started making up a new set of words for it as he went along — funny things that made him break up laughing.

"She came down the aisle, *bearing a child, a vision of pregnancy . . .*"

It was a silly, wild notion. Elvis laughed like a big kid, along with everyone else sitting around him.

He took any song we asked him to sing and he'd start doing crazy things with the words. It was a game he loved.

After a while, he got serious. He looked up

and began singing religious songs. His face changed. The feeling he put into the songs obviously came straight from his heart and soul. One song was "Peace In The Valley." It seemed to touch his own life in a personal way. Listening to him play and sing, you felt like he had been through a lot in his life. You felt for him.

He used a power in his voice that I had never heard on any of his recordings. The power was almost overwhelming.

At the end of the song, when the last notes had died, Elvis started playing some low rumbling notes that sort of stirred your heart deeper than you had wanted — or expected. It was called, "You'll Never Walk Alone." And Elvis sang it in a way that made you feel that something had happened to make you really lonely but there was a promise that in your darkest hour, someone would be there to hold your hand and walk the dark path beside you. It was from a big Broadway show and one of the most beautiful things I had ever heard. I felt the tears on my cheeks. Then I saw tears in Elvis' eyes. He didn't seem to care if everyone around him saw them. He was feeling something deeply and honestly. But he was with his friends and so he wasn't afraid to show his emotions.

I had never seen this willingness to show deep feelings in any man before. It was beautiful and unexpected. More of Elvis, the person, was emerging to me.

Then he was playing softly and singing — looking from one to the other of us — a song which was a little prayer. It began with the words, "If I have wounded any soul today . . ."

After an hour or so, Elvis got up and wiped his eyes on the back of his hand and strolled out of the room.

We all stood around talking. Elvis had left a good feeling behind him.

One by one, people began drifting toward other parts of the house — drawn toward wherever they thought Elvis might be.

"Elvis sure missed his calling," Heidi said.

"Missed his calling?" I said.

"He sure did," she said. "He should always sing religious songs. He can do them better than anyone in the whole world."

Frances said, "Frankly, I'd rather hear him do religious songs than anything else he does. They're my favorites. He does one called, 'Who Am I?' which is one of the most beautiful songs I ever heard."

"It's a gorgeous thing," said Heidi. Then she got a puzzled look on her face. "Frances, did you notice if he sang to anyone special tonight?"

"Well, if he did, it wasn't to me," Frances said, ruefully.

"It wasn't me, either," Heidi said.

"It's real strange," Heidi said. "Sometimes, when he's in here, singing to us, he sings mostly just to one person. It's real sweet and its obvious to everyone — but it never makes anybody else jealous or anything. Elvis gets around to sharing his attentions with everyone. He's good about that. So you don't get jealous when he's not singing to you."

Heidi shrugged. "If it's not me tonight — then it will be me another night."

Frances headed for the hallway. "Let's go back to the kitchen," she said. "I hear Elvis laughing in there."

We followed her to find out why Elvis was laughing.

When we walked in, Elvis looked up at me.

"Hey, darlin'," he said. "Come sit here by me. I want to show you something crazy."

I sat down by him at the counter in front of the myna bird in the cage. The bird was whistling "Dixie," moving his feet up and down in such a way that he looked like he was marching.

"He sits here all day long and listens to this phone ring," said Elvis. "He hears all kinds of excuses they give for not waking me up. Listen. He'll come up with them in a minute."

Sure enough, when the myna bird finished whistling "Dixie," he started squawking, "Elvis is asleep . . ." "Elvis can't come to the phone now . . ." "He's in a meeting . . ." "Call back . . ."

Elvis leaned toward the cage and the myna bird looked at him with beady eyes and tilted head and said, "Elvis won't be back tonight."

Elvis died laughing.

The bird caused a lot of laughter in the early days. Later on, it caused a sense of mystery because of the way in which it died.

The phone on the end of the counter rang.

One of the guys scooped it up. "Hello?" He listened, then covered the phone with his hand and turned to Elvis. "It's Brother Dave Gardner."

"Where's he calling from?" Elvis asked.

"He's already here."

"Where?" Elvis said.

"Right down here at the front gate," he said.

Elvis smiled and reached for the phone. "Let me talk to him."

"Glad you're here, Dave," he said. "Tell the guard I said to let you through."

Elvis hung up the phone.

"Let's go downstairs," he said. "I'll be there in a minute."

Elvis hurried up the kitchen stairs to his room.

People got up and began stirring around.

"Where did Elvis run off to?" I said.

"To change clothes, I bet," Mack Gurley said. "I've seen him change clothes two or three times a day. He's got more clothes up there than one room will hold. And the *shoes*!"

He opened the refrigerator to find a Pepsi. He motioned for me to come take a look.

"Here's something else," he said.

There was a pound of bacon, a dozen eggs and some Pepsis.

"That's about all you ever see in there, too," Mack said.

"How come?" I said.

"That's a story, too," he said. "Back when the Presleys lived downtown in the housing projects, they hardly ever had more than enough money for the next meal.

"Elvis explained it to me. He told how they would scrape a dollar or two together and send him down to the store to get whatever it was they decided to have for the next meal.

"That would leave them broke again — or with just enough for one more meal, or leftovers to eat the next morning.

"That pattern became set with them through the years. So they never did just go to the store and stock up on things. They just bought for the next meal. A dollar's worth of this and a dollar's worth of that."

He shut the refrigerator door.

"That's all I ever saw in this refrigerator — a dozen eggs, a pound of bacon and some Pepsis. It never changes.

"When they get ready to eat they send Alberta or someone out to buy just the groceries they need. They sometimes buy a whole lot but, by the

time they feed everyone around here, it's all gone. And this is all you have left."

Mack and I started down to the pool room in the basement.

I liked Mack. He obviously loved Elvis.

"Have you known him long?" I said. I had learned that when anyone in the house said "him," everybody knew you were talking about Elvis.

A delighted smile lit his face. He leaned against a corner at the head of the stairs.

"I guess I met Elvis before he ever became really what you would call famous," he said. "We both moved up here from Mississippi so we had a lot in common from the first.

"There's a drive-in here in Memphis called Kay's. It's a barbeque place. No matter where you'd go on a date — the movies or just driving around — you'd go there afterward for a hamburger or a Coke.

"One night Elvis came walking into their parking lot. I was sitting in my car with my girlfriend, Annette Maddox.

"I had never seen Elvis before and he came over to the car and began flirting with Annette. I thought it was pretty brazen of him. Then he just got in the front seat with us and asked, 'Which way you going?'

"I decided to just take him on home. I had a pretty nice car and he was on foot.

"Well, when I got out of Messick High, I went into the Air Force. I was sitting in a truck stop drinking a cup of coffee and thinking about home when I heard this voice on the jukebox that sounded familiar. I looked at the name and it was Elvis Presley. I didn't recognize the name, right then. But that night it came to me who Elvis was.

"I came back home on leave and I had a little

cousin who was a real screamer. Jimmi Phillips. She had a friend named Frances. *Our* Frances.

"One day I dropped both of them off in front of Elvis' house on Audubon Drive. I was about to drive off when Elvis leaned down over the hood and looked at me through the windshield.

"'Hi, Mack,' he said. 'I haven't seen you in a long time.'

"'I've been off in the Air Force,' I said. 'I'm just home on furlough a few days.'

"I was amazed! He hadn't seen me in three or four years. Not since that one time in Kay's parking lot, but he remembered my name.

"Elvis said, 'Come by and see me the next time you're back in town.'

"I was tongue-tied.

"I drove the little screamers around a lot when I was at home. I got to know all the parents. They told me they all felt their little girls were all right, as long as I was there to take care of them."

He shrugged off the compliment.

"Once or twice, Elvis has jokingly asked me to look after his 'harem' while he was gone," he said. "He was in a light mood. I took him exactly how he said it. He wasn't serious. Oh, there are girls who are probably old enough to *be* his harem.

"I know him well enough that he wouldn't mess himself up with girls who are fourteen — like you, Frances and Heidi. He has too good a reputation as a clean young American boy who has a lot of respect for everyone around him."

He nodded for emphasis. "Come on. Let's go downstairs."

We hurried down the thickly carpeted stairs and turned right into the pool room where the click of pool balls and all the laughter were coming from.

On the right side of the entrance was the big chair that Elvis always sat in. On the walls were framed certificates and professional honors. Elvis' framed high school diploma was also there. I liked standing, studying his class picture. The walls of the den, just across the hall, were covered with gold records. There were television sets and a movie screen that could be pulled down.

There was a small organ at the far end of the pool room.

Dave Gardner walked in with Elvis. He was carrying on his Southern craziness, just like he did on stage. He already had Elvis laughing. He and Elvis began shooting pool. Everybody gathered around them, watching the show. And laughing along with them.

"Watch this, Dave," Elvis said.

He had on an entirely new outfit in light blue with a high collar. His hair shone black and was freshly brushed in place. Diamonds sparkled on his hand. A heavy gold chain with a beautiful large crucifix hung from his neck.

As Dave Gardner watched him, Elvis held his cue stick out in front of him, level with the floor. Very steady. Then he picked up the white cue ball. He placed it very carefully on the thick round end of the stick.

Slowly his fingers relaxed on the ball, releasing it.

"Lord, God," Gardner muttered.

Elvis, without breathing, it seemed, spread his fingers out like a fan over the ball and it remained balanced on the cue stick.

Then he slowly tilted the stick toward Gardner and the ball rolled a little ways down the cue stick. Very slowly. Elvis brought the cue stick level again. The ball stopped rolling. Then he tilted it back

toward himself. The white cue ball rolled back along the cue stick into his open hand.

Elvis dropped the ball on the green table top and smiled at Gardner.

Gardner raised both palms toward Elvis like a country preacher offering a benediction.

In his best Southern pulpit voice he said gravely, "You have just shown the world a miracle. A miracle, Brother Elvis. And a power of faith to do amazing things. If you want to, Brother Elvis, you could walk up those stairs, right this minute, go down to the swimming pool and walk out on the water.

"A man who can balance a cue ball on a pool stick like you did and make it roll back and forth without falling off — that man, I say, has a faith strong enough to walk on water."

Elvis laughed. "Dave, you're crazy as Hell."

Dave held out a beckoning hand. "Come. Show the world something that it will never forget. Come. Walk on the water."

Elvis shook his head after a moment.

"You *can* do it, Brother Elvis," Gardner said. He sounded serious.

"So what happens if I get out in the middle of the pool and my faith fails me?" Elvis said.

Gardner hesitated and then he smiled. "Why, son, you'll drown yourself if you can't swim."

Elvis laughed and nearly threw his cue stick at him.

"You crazy fool," he said. "What do you think I am, anyway?"

The night before Elvis left on the train for his big tour of the Northwest, he called downstairs and told one of the guys to send me up to his room with Heidi and Frances.

He was sitting relaxed in bed. We sat down

beside him.

He told us how he was going to miss us all while he was out on tour and how he wanted all of us to be good until he got back.

"Remember," he said, "I really care what's happening to you back home. I care about each one of you."

He sounded so serious and a bit sad. It was touching.

"But aren't you going to meet some cute girl out on the tour and in Hollywood when the tour gets there? You could get married on us, one of these days, Elvis," Heidi said.

Elvis shook his head. "No chance."

Frances eyed him. "You can say that — but it could happen," she said. "You meet a lot of glamorous women out there. We're not movie star types like they are."

He looked at us the way your father would — and as a boyfriend might. He clearly didn't want to leave us. He was getting depressed — and so were we — and you could feel it in the air.

"You don't have a thing to worry about," he said. "Show business girls are not my kind of folks. They're all made out of some kind of plastic. They're not real. Most of them.

"Either one of you girls has as good a chance to marry me as anyone I know. You think I'll get out in California and meet someone at the studio and get tied up with them.

"You never have to worry about that. I'll never marry before I'm thirty years old — if then — and I'll *never* marry anyone in show business.

"When you're alone with one of those girls all they talk about is how great they are. How well they did this and how well they did that. They are

the most boring people I have ever known in my life."

He found a little thin cigar.

"You know I love y'all and I always will," he said. "You're the ones I think about when I'm away and you're the ones I always come back to.

"When I marry, I want a girl who will stay home and take care of my kids. I want four kids. Two boys and two girls. There's nothing I would love more.

"My wife is not going to have time for an outside career."

He put the long cigar between his lips. Heidi held a match to the end of it. In the match light he winked at me and puffed on it until it glowed bright.

"Any one of you are as cute as any one of them," he said. "If you could see them show up at the studio at five in the morning. With no makeup on yet. You'd see you're just as beautiful as any of them — and *more* beautiful than a lot of them.

"They can be so dirty mouthed you wouldn't believe it.

"I was at a party when I was out there to make *Jailhouse Rock*. They had some of the biggest names in the business wandering around the house. Some were outside, drinking, talking big and loud. We were just hanging around, me and some of the guys who went out there with me. After a while, we heard this big argument going on. This one woman, a big celebrity around the world, was married to one of the most famous producers out there. They were going at it. Yelling at each other across the swimming pool — the long way across the pool. They were fighting tooth and nail.

"I never heard such words in my life between a man and a woman — in public, on top of that. I

never did trust people who would act like that."

Elvis repeated some of the words they used. He blushed pink, all the way down to his white collar.

"I told the guys, 'Come on. We got better things to do than hang around here listening to stuff like this.'

"So you don't have to sit back here wondering what's happening to me. Just look after yourself."

He looked around. "Who's got some gum?"

I dug some out of my purse. He peeled it and put it in his mouth.

"I don't want any of you getting in trouble while I'm gone," he said, like a serious father again.

Frances said, "What kind of trouble could we get into?"

Elvis pointed his finger at her. "You never know, Frances. You get in with some wrong people and you're in trouble before you realize it. Look, I want y'all to be extra careful of who you go around with. I don't want anything bad happening. I don't want to get back here in a couple of months and find one of you off with the wrong bunch somewhere — and me have to come get you.

"What I want you to do is stick together when I'm not here. That way, you can help look after each other. I'll feel a whole lot better if I know you're all together when you go out somewhere.

"None of you go wandering off by yourself.

"You know you can call me collect anytime you want to, wherever I am. Maybe it's nothing special. Just something you want to talk to me about.

"I'll miss each one of you so much. I want to hear from you. I want to know what's going on back here."

Heidi said, "Elvis, do you know how big a

phone bill you'd have at the end of the month if all of us started calling you collect, every time you leave town?"

Elvis frowned at her. "Heidi, that's what you make money for, things like this. What else is it good for?"

Heidi shrugged and glanced at me and Frances. None of us would feel like charging phone calls to Elvis — and we never did. Our feeling toward him did not include taking advantage of his money. Whatever he might tell us, we would still call him only when we had saved up enough money to pay for it ourselves.

But his caring for us gave us each a warm and wonderful feeling. It was the feeling that you were really important to someone you love.

"One more thing," he said. "I won't be back until after your school starts. I want you all back in school — on time. I don't want any truant officer coming up here looking for you."

He punched up some pillows and sat up against them on the big bed. We gathered around him. He talked some more about his tour that was going to take him finally down into Los Angeles.

We felt very close.

It was nearly dawn before he stretched out a little further and closed his eyes. He yawned and his breathing slowed. His face got very peaceful.

We each bent down and kissed him on the cheek and eased off the bed. We left the bedroom without another sound.

As I closed the door behind us, I looked at Elvis sleeping. He was so cute.

There were so many things he seemed to worry about. It was odd to think that Elvis Presley was a nail biter — but that's what he was. That's why his nails were always so short.

In four days since I had arrived at Graceland, I had come to think of Elvis as if he had always been a part of my life. And he treated me as if I were a part of his — as if I had always been with him.

Through the newspapers in Chicago I kept track of Elvis on tour of the Northwest. It turned into something wild. In Vancouver, British Columbia, he created a riot. It began when he entered the arena in his thread-of-gold tuxedo with rhinestones that Nudie of Hollywood had made for him for ten- thousand dollars. He circled the arena in a white Cadillac convertible and then jumped up onto a flatbed trailer with his band for his show.

A red coated line of Canadian Mounties tried to hold the crowds back. Elvis was singing with his band, J. D. Fontana, Bill Black, and Scotty Moore. When he started into a hard rock, a wave of fans rushed the line of Mounties and overwhelmed them.

Elvis, at first, tried to keep singing. The flatbed trailer began to sway and Elvis and his band fled for their lives as the fans surged onto the flatbed to get a touch of Elvis or any souvenir they could rip off the stage.

He was an even bigger smash at his Los Angeles concert. A city of stars had found its newest and brightest — *Elvis*. Movie people clambered all over each other to be next to Elvis in much the same way the fans in Vancouver had.

I telephoned him at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel where he was staying. I was surprised I could get through to him.

"Darlin', I want you to come to Memphis when I get back home," he said. "I'll be there as soon as I finish making *King Creole*. I'll be there for Christmas."

CHAPTER 4

A Call From Memphis

A few days before the Christmas vacation began at Bateman High, Elvis had his Uncle Travis call my mother.

Uncle Travis asked mother's permission for me to come down to spend Christmas with Elvis and his family.

Travis and his wife, Lorraine, lived in a little house that had stood for many years in the field behind Graceland. Travis told mother I would be staying with them. He said Elvis wanted to assure her that he and his family would take very good care of me.

They discussed it and mother decided it would be all right for me to go down. I was to be on the train the following evening. Someone would meet me when I arrived.

When she hung up the phone I hugged her and said, "Mom, can you believe it? Elvis really *does* want me with him for Christmas."

I was so excited I could barely stand it. I flew up the stairs and stormed through my closet, trying to decide what clothes to take to Memphis. A close girlfriend of mine, who lived just down the

street from me, begged me to take some of hers. We wore the same sizes. When I called her to tell her I was going to spend Christmas at Graceland she pleaded with me to take some of her clothes and wear them when I was with Elvis.

Uncle Travis and Billy were waiting at the train station in Memphis for me when I arrived.

"Well, it looks like things worked out pretty good," Uncle Travis said with a big smile.

He put me in the back seat of his car with my suitcase and drove me out to Graceland. Uncle Vester waved us on through the gate and the crowd of fans standing there watching and taking pictures. Someone took a picture of me smiling out the car window.

There was a big sign in front of the house that you could see all the way down to the highway. It read: "Merry Christmas, Y'All — Elvis." And there was a big Santa Claus and prancing reindeer sailing through the trees.

Uncle Travis waved at Santa and said, "Elvis loves all this kind of thing."

He stopped in front of the steps leading up to the small front porch of the little wooden house that he and Lorraine lived in, behind Graceland. It looked like it had been part of an earlier time.

Lorraine showed me the bedroom where I could leave my things. Then we went in the kitchen and she made us some fresh coffee. They made me feel like kinfolks.

"How are Elvis' mom and dad doing?" I said.

Lorraine peeked out the kitchen window at the yard behind Graceland.

"They usually take a long walk every morning," she said. "They like to walk around. There they are now. You can catch them. They'd be glad to see you."

I ran outside in time to go in the house with them.

"Arlene, honey, come on in and have breakfast with me," Mrs. Presley said. "Vernon's got some work to do. You can keep me company."

She gave me a hug. "Elvis will be tickled to know you got down."

We went in the kitchen and she started pulling out plates and frying pans and things and setting a little table for us.

"I'm sure glad your mother decided to let you come down and be with us for Christmas," she said. "We're going to have a good time this year."

"I don't want to be anywhere else," I said.

She put on some bacon and cracked some eggs in a skillet. The maid, Alberta, was not there yet. Mrs. Presley looked like she enjoyed being able to get in the kitchen again.

She dished up big plates of potatoes, eggs and bacon.

"Oh, honey," she said, "I'm afraid I got the bacon a little on the burned side. I hope it isn't too crisp for you."

I shook my head. "Oh, no. It's fine."

It was slightly burned but it was the way she and Elvis seemed to prefer it and I didn't want her to have to cook another batch just for me.

She poured hot coffee for both of us and then she sat down with me to eat. She pushed the sugar bowl and the cream pitcher over closer to me.

"I remember how you doctor up your coffee," she said, laughing. "Vernon said, one time, 'You ought to see the way Arlene even puts a lot of sugar on her *grits*.' "

I spent most of the day with Mrs. Presley.

The rest of the house was dressed up for Christmas in a warm and wonderful way. Red holi-

day curtains were up on all the windows at Elvis' request, Mrs. Presley said.

"And he loves to have all these fresh flowers everywhere," she said. "Especially the roses."

There was a big Christmas tree that nearly touched the ceiling in the dining room. It was white flocked and it revolved as Christmas music came out of it.

Fans down at the gate brought Elvis gifts all year long. At Christmas the flow of gate gifts turned into a flood. Guards kept bringing things up to the house, all through the day and night. These gifts were added to the growing pile of gifts under the big revolving tree.

"Things that don't go under the tree in the dining room go up in the attic," Mrs. Presley said. "Or Elvis sends them on to children and poor folks in the hospitals around here. He likes to share with people who won't have anything otherwise."

She walked over to the dining room window and looked down at the fans standing at the gate, looking up at the house.

"I feel for those people who wait down there to see Elvis," she said. "Elvis does, too. A lot of times, he'll walk down there and stay and talk to them for the longest time. He'll try to answer all the questions and sign all the autographs they want. They still don't want him to leave. They beg him to stay and talk some more.

"I just wish we could ask every one of those people to come on up here and spend Christmas with us. Elvis wants to make everybody happy." She sighed. "It's a hard thing to try."

There were good smells of cookies and cakes and candies in the house. Alberta insisted on doing her own Christmas cooking for Elvis but friends of the Presley family kept cooking holiday

things and sending them up to the house.

In the late afternoon, Elvis woke up and called downstairs for his mother.

"Elvis," she said, "the dentist's office called again. They said tell you it was time for your checkup." She paused and listened, then said, "Son, you need to go ahead and make an appointment. Your teeth are important. Promise me you'll call them."

She put down the phone and shook her head. "He's hard to get to go to the dentist when he doesn't want to." She sighed. "He's coming down for his breakfast. I didn't tell him you were here. I thought I'd let that be your little surprise."

Elvis came down the kitchen stairs from his room upstairs. He picked up his mother and kissed her and spun her around.

"Put me down, Elvis," She said, kissing his cheek. "See who's here."

He put her down gently and looked around.

"Well, look who's here," he said. He came over and hugged me and kissed me and led me over to sit by him at the table.

Mrs. Presley said, "Son, you promised."

Elvis frowned and raised one hand in surrender. He picked up the phone and dialed.

"Doc, what time you want me to come in?" he said.

He waited a minute and said, "I'll be there."

He smiled at his mother. "Happy now?"

His mother already had started cooking his breakfast which was the same thing she had cooked for us — burned bacon, eggs and potatoes.

After he had breakfast, Elvis wandered through the house with me toward the music room. He glanced at the pile of gifts under the tree and at some of the cards hanging near the front

door. He sampled a piece of white divinity fudge in a bowl in the hallway. Then he settled down at the piano and told me to sit by him on the bench.

There was music playing quietly throughout the house. It was all Christmas music and spirituals. Elvis listened to it, picked up the tune and quietly played along with it, singing softly.

He got up and walked across the room to a vase of roses and picked one out and brought it back to me. Then he sat down and continued playing and singing.

He smiled at me. I could see he got a kick out of having a girl with him who was so thrilled she didn't know what to do. Or what to say.

He leaned down toward me and said, "Have I told you today that I think you're beautiful? Have I?"

After a while, he got up and wandered back through the house toward the kitchen.

"Did you bring your bluejeans with you?" he asked.

"Oh, sure," I said.

"Want to run upstairs to the dressing room and put them on, after a while?" he said.

"They're over at Uncle Travis' place," I said. "Let me go over there for a while and then I'll be back."

He gave me a big hug and kiss. "I'm glad you're here."

"Me, too," I said.

I took the rose he gave me up to Uncle Travis' house and put it in a little vase in my room.

I freshened up and changed clothes and sat talking with Aunt Lorraine.

"I'd offer you supper but you'll be eating with Elvis before long," she said.

"I think it's going to be corn dogs tonight," I said.

"Always is at the skating rink, they say," she said.

I walked back down to the house and went down to the den, looking for people. It was nearly eleven o'clock and people had begun drifting in, all wearing bluejeans.

Elvis' cousin, Wayne Mann, came in. Some others were sitting around talking, keeping an eye on the entrance. Wayne sat down beside me. He was easy going. He made me feel at ease. He was a genuine person.

"Have you seen Elvis?" I said. It was a standard little question we all asked each other.

Wayne nodded. "I sure did," he said. He pulled a fifty dollar bill out of his pocket.

"You know I live downtown on Adams, right?" he said.

I nodded.

"Well, I was walking down Adams," he said, "a little earlier this evening and Elvis came driving by. He was going downtown for something. Maybe Christmas shopping — or just getting out for a little while.

"Anyway, he saw me and pulled over to the side of the street beside me. He rolled down the window and said, 'Merry Christmas. Buy yourself something.'

"And he held out this fifty dollar bill.

"I didn't have a cent in my pocket — and wondering where I could scrape up enough to buy my folks something. Me, just seventeen and no job in sight.

"Then along comes Santa Claus in a big black Cadillac and says, 'Go buy yourself something with this.' "

Wayne looked at me.

"That kind of thing sounds like I just made it up," he said. "But I didn't."

He studied the fifty dollar bill in his hand.

"I'll take it home and give it to my mother," he said.

We sat a moment, listening to Christmas music on the record player.

The phone rang and someone picked it up. Then they stood up and announced, "He's ready to go."

Everybody headed out of the house to the long line of cars parked in front.

Elvis came out in his bluejeans. He never wore them except to the skating rink or the football field. He looked at all the people piling into all the different cars. He shook his head.

"I'm going to buy a big pickup truck," he said. "Big enough to hold everyone in the back end. That way, we can all be together instead of running around in a lot of separate cars."

Frances, Heidi and I stood there waiting, trying to look terribly unconcerned. Of course, each of us was dying to be the one Elvis would ask to ride up front with him in his big black limousine. He would turn to us, in a moment, open the front door on the passenger side and motion to one of us to jump in. The others would ride in the back seats with Patsy Presley, Elvis' double first cousin, and some of the other guys and girls who had come by that night.

He looked at me.

He opened the door and said, "Jump in, Arlene."

I rode down the winding drive among the tall trees in the front seat with Elvis Presley driving — and me sitting there by him in bluejeans!

The lawn in front of the house was beautiful. All the Christmas lights had been put up and turned on before Elvis came back from California. His mother and dad wanted them burning when he arrived home.

Elvis was feeling good. He leaned over and sniffed my neck. "Who told you?" he asked.

"About what?" I said.

"White Shoulders," he said. "That's what you're wearing. I can tell."

Heidi and Frances had told me Elvis preferred White Shoulders to any other perfume. I found some in a drugstore. I sniffed it and it smelled a little on the sweet side. But, if Elvis wanted his perfume a little on the sweet side . . .

"I heard somewhere that you liked it," I said.

"I don't like it," he said. "I *love* it."

Elvis eased the long limousine into the swarm of fans around the front gate. He stopped directly by a girl in a wheelchair and rolled down his window. He reached out his hand to her and she touched it.

"How you doin', darlin'?" he said with a big smile.

She said something but all the talking around her drowned it out.

People began shoving pieces of paper through the window at him. The caravan of his cars behind us stopped, headlights in a curving line down the hill.

Elvis didn't carry a pencil or a pen. People gave them to him and he wrote his name and handed them back. Every kind of piece of paper came through the window. Torn out pages of books. School notebook paper. Department store bills. Novels. Pictures. Candy wrappers. Autograph books.

And everybody was asking questions about Elvis' tours, his movies, his girlfriends, his Christmas plans — everything. Girls kept telling him how *"gorgeous"* he was.

Elvis looked across at me. He shook his head. "Can you believe all this?" he said.

Girls even stuck their arms through the window for him to write his name on.

Elvis was not annoyed in any way. He just loved it all.

"If it wasn't for these people," he said, "I wouldn't be where I am today. I'll never forget them."

A bare, dirty little foot came through the window. It nearly hit Elvis in the face. There was a pen stuck between two toes. Elvis took the pen, wrote his name on the bare leg and shoved the pen back between the toes. The leg withdrew through the window.

Elvis rolled up the window. "Thanks," he said. "Merry Christmas."

Fans stayed pressed up against his window. From the other side they stared curiously at me and tried to see who else was sitting in back.

Elvis eased the limousine forward through the crowd and out on the highway and headed north. The caravan of headlights followed him.

"It's unbelievable," he said. "It never ceases to amaze me."

Elvis drove several miles east from the airport and then turned in at a deserted parking lot behind Rainbow skating rink. We all got out and went inside. Lights blazed in the empty rink. Music pounded from all the loudspeakers. A couple of people waited behind the counters for us.

A rare picture.

We went over to get fitted for skates. Elvis seemed oddly shy about his feet.

I sat by him, pulling on my skates.

He held up the heel of one of his skates. "Why do they always have to put the size of it on the back of the heel?" he said, irritated.

One by one, everyone got out on the skate floor. Some of the guys started doing the fancy stuff.

Frances tested her skates and headed for the girls' room. I got up and went with her.

She checked her lipstick in the big mirror, pushed a wayward strand of hair back into place. Satisfied, she lit a cigaret and said, "Elvis likes to play 'crack the whip.' The last time we were here, he was on one end of the whip. I was right in front of him. When the tail was about to crack, Elvis tickled me so much I had to let go. I sailed across the rink and hit a rail at about thirty miles an hour. My nose started bleeding all over the place. Elvis came racing over, all concerned about me, to see that I wasn't badly hurt."

She puffed on her cigaret. "My blouse got all torn up. It was in shreds. When I got home that night, my mother just stood there and looked at me in horror. I was afraid she was going to say, 'Frances, never again.' "

"Right after that, Elvis said all the girls had to wear knee pads. So we better get some or he won't let us out on the floor."

Elvis was not out on the floor skating when we came back out. He was standing with his back up against the wall. A couple of the guys were with him. They were laughing and yelling back and forth. The rest of the crowd was out on the floor, skating to a waltz.

Patsy hollered across, "Hey, Elvis. Why aren't you skating?"

He yelled back, "Pee Pee, I split my damn pants. I sent Lamar home to get another pair. Don't stare at me."

We started laughing. "Turn around and let us see," Heidi said.

"Oh, no," Elvis said.

Lamar came running in the back door a few minutes later with Elvis' pants. Some of the guys followed closely behind Elvis to the men's room. Their bodies shielded him and you couldn't see where his pants were split.

The guys stood guard outside. Elvis went in alone and changed.

When he came back out he announced, "It's time for war."

That meant that the guys — no girls permitted — would divide up into two teams. The teams would face each other from opposite ends of the rink. Then one of the guys would blow a whistle. That would be the signal for both teams to come charging down the rink at each other, trying to slam, trip, dump and tumble everybody on the other team. Everyone on the other team was to be put down.

The guys started teaming up at each end of the rink.

"He's got a big crowd tonight," Frances said. "Maybe he won't notice if we're not there. He's all involved. He's not thinking about what we're doing. Come on."

I followed her and Heidi into the girls' room. We lit up a cigarette and checked ourselves out in the mirror.

"Don't let him catch you smoking," Heidi warned.

Young rink pals.

Arlene and Elvis at Rainbow.

"He doesn't say anything about other girls smoking around him," I said. "Why does he object if you do?"

"He says 'it's not becoming' for us to smoke," said Frances.

We heard skates roll up to the door.

"Watch it!" Frances said. "He'll just come on in."

Cigarets flashed through the air into toilet bowls. Breath spray bottles came out of purses in a blur of motion.

The door banged and swung open. Another girl came in on her skates.

We sighed and lit fresh cigarets.

In a minute, we went back outside after carefully spraying our mouths.

Elvis called across the rink, "I've got my eye on y'all. Why were you hanging out in there so long?"

Frances shrugged. "The usual."

"Yeah, I'll bet," Elvis said.

Some guy with a whistle in the middle of the rink started blasting it. The two lines of skaters headed for each other in the middle of the rink at top speed. It was like two lines of football players running at each other on kickoff.

The two lines of skaters collided. Bodies slammed together. People tripped over knees and slammed down hard on the floor. They were shoving each other and yelling and clothes began ripping. Buttons flew. Faces took on the expression of players who had only one thing in mind — getting rid of the other side.

I could see that the people who survived were the ones who crawled off the floor and escaped under the nearest railing as soon as they got knocked down the first time. If somebody got up again, they were asking for more physical

trauma — and somebody was waiting for them with a smile and a lunge.

Elvis eventually saw that his troops were wearing thin. He called for a pronto pup break.

He always had a man there at the rink to make pronto pups for everybody. He loved them dipped in a bowl of mustard.

Elvis got back out on the floor first. He moved with ease and grace around the floor. He made skating look effortless.

He circled the floor a couple of times and then suddenly he fell flat and lay there motionless.

We were terrified. We jumped up and raced out to him. The first ones to get there bent over him and yelled, "Elvis!"

"Oh, Elvis," Heidi gasped. "Elvis!"

Elvis suddenly raised with a triumphant laugh and a burst of "HA HA HA HA HA HA. Fooled you, didn't I?"

He jumped up and started skating off.

They chased him around the rink.

I thought, as I watched him, after that kind of scene he had just played, that he was a better actor than any of us knew. His collapse on the floor looked so real that some of us were nearly in tears. He knew that he had given us heart failure — and he loved it.

When the night was nearly gone, we turned in our skates and turned off all the lights. When we drove away the place was totally dark.

Graceland was beautiful as we approached it along the highway from the north and turned in at the gate.

Uncle Travis came out and leaned on Elvis' door.

"Elvis, there's a girl sleeping in the guard house," he said. "She says she's out of money and

can't get back home for Christmas. She wondered if you'd help her. I told her she could wait around if she wanted to."

Elvis looked toward the guardhouse.

"I'll send one of the guys back down here with enough money to get her home," he said.

Then we drove on up the hill that was aglow with Christmas colors.

"Graceland is so beautiful at night," I said.

"Thank you, honey," Elvis said. "I'm kinda proud of it myself."

"Will you be here long enough to spend your birthday at home?" I asked.

He reached over with a free hand and took mine.

He looked up at the big smiling Santa and his reindeer. At the white pillars on the front of the house that showed streaks of different Christmas lights on them — blue and red and green and yellow.

"I'll always be here on my birthday," he said. "It's in my contract that I'm free to go home for all the holidays and my birthday."

Elvis parked at the front door and we walked up the steps between the two white lion statues. The cozy feeling of Christmas was everywhere as we walked in the house under the heavy glittering chandelier. The gorgeous red drapes. The huge Christmas tree in the dining room with brightly wrapped gifts stacked high around it. Spicy food smells. Carols softly playing throughout the house.

Elvis stopped. He looked around at me and winked. "We're a long way from Christmas in that little shotgun house back in Tupelo," he said.

He looked at the pile of gifts. "When I was a kid, I stood in line downtown to get charity sacks

of clothes and food and toys."

He walked on into the kitchen with us following him.

In the morning, Elvis' mother invited me to stop and have breakfast with her.

"Just tell me what you want me to fix for you," she said with a big smile.

"Just anything, thanks," I said. "That would be fine."

She burned the bacon, as usual, but I pretended not to notice.

"Elvis was reading the Bible to me after everybody left," I said.

She smiled. "He loves that book," she said.

"And he talked a long time before he finally fell asleep a few minutes ago," I said.

She nodded and passed me the butter for my grits and toast.

"Oh, I know you girls who go up there with him," she said. "I trust every one of you.

"And there's no way I could ever believe Elvis would hurt any one of you. I might wonder about other boys up there — but not him."

She sipped her hot coffee.

"I've been thinking about him a lot, lately," she said. "I wish he would hurry up and get married so he could give me a grandchild.

"I want Elvis married to someone who really loves him and will care for him. I know you girls love him to death. He needs that."

She looked out the back window as she continued to eat. The chickens were beginning to line up at the back door for Miss Minnie to come out and feed them.

"All this happened so fast after Elvis got famous," she said. "It's been hard for us to get used to it.

"Elvis is always wanting to shower me with minks or some expensive something. All I really want him to give me is a fine grandchild I can bounce on my knees and hold in my arms."

She got up and wiped her hands on her apron. She poured more coffee for us.

That afternoon when he woke up, Elvis called downstairs. He told one of the guys to take the pickup truck and drive across the river to Arkansas and get a load of fireworks. They couldn't be bought in Memphis.

"Buy out the whole stand," Elvis said.

In a couple of hours, the guy came back with a huge load of Roman candles, torpedoes, whistlers, fire crackers as big as dynamite sticks, whirlers, things that did crazy things in the night sky and then exploded in a shower of colors.

It was dark outside when Elvis came downstairs and had breakfast. When he finished, he got up and said, "You girls can watch us tonight but you have to stay back. I don't want any of you getting burned."

The guys all headed out back. They split into two war parties and they were not very far apart. Each side built a little fire near their own separate stack of fireworks to use for lighting fuses fast.

Elvis pulled on some leather gloves and joined one of the teams. He checked the stack of Roman candles. He tore out the bottom of the cartons so he could grab them out by the butt ends and light them quickly at the fire.

He let out a yell and started spraying the other team with a pair of Roman candles held in his hands like guns. The sixteen-shot candles ripped brilliant incendiary fireballs through their ranks, lighting up their startled faces with weird whirling lights.

A rocket came ripping across on a flat trajectory toward Elvis' team. The guys grabbed up some lids off garbage cans and held them up like shields. Some of the rockets bounced off them and disappeared up over the house.

Rockets began ripping back and forth, making scary *whooosh* sounds. Flaring lights were blinding. Now and then, a rocket would go wild and shoot by us at close range. Our screams joined the general roar of the rocket war.

Sometimes the guys would throw down their garbage can lids so they could light some more fireworks and they would forget to pick them back up. Some got powder burns before they knew it.

We could hear Elvis yelling to his team. It was weird, watching them racing about in the middle of those wavering flares and bright bursts. When the firecrackers started arching over, fuses sputtering in the dark, it began sounding like a real battleground. Guys were yelling.

"God, I hope none of them gets really hurt," I said.

"It'd serve them right," said Frances.

One of Elvis' rockets flew out of control and disappeared over the back fence into trees where a few houses were.

When they had fired their last shot, the guys came back indoors laughing. They all went into the living room. Elvis sat down next to me on the couch. As the guys talked about who did what to whom, I began to notice a strange smell coming from Elvis. I leaned over and smelled his hair. He looked at me and I said, "Your hair is singed."

He had on a red zip jacket. I showed him where he had little burned holes all over the jacket.

He looked down at it and said, "That's one jacket gone to pot — but it was worth it."

Mack Gurley came in from the front and signalled Elvis.

Elvis stood up. "You get 'em?" he said.

"All they had in stock," Mack said. "I left them out in the car. I'll set them out behind the house."

Elvis went upstairs to change clothes. "What's that, Mack?" I said.

"Model airplanes," he said. "The kind that has gasoline engines and you control by radio. Elvis wants to have a dogfight. He signed me a blank check and said to go down to the store at the shopping center and buy up all the planes they had. Everyone has to have one."

The other guys milled around the kitchen, counted their burns and got drinks out of the refrigerator. Elvis came back downstairs and the guys trailed him back outside.

"And what do we do in the meantime?" Frances said.

"I've got to see this one," Heidi said.

The three of us went over to a window looking onto the dark back yard.

Elvis had brought a can of gasoline out of the garage and was pouring it over one of the planes. The guys silently stood back. Elvis grinned and dropped a match on his plane which immediately burst into flames. The little engine was already running. Elvis gunned it on the remote control board and it took off into the night sky on a flaming death mission.

The other guys quickly got the idea. They each got a plane and started the engine and then doused it with gasoline and set it afire.

Little planes swarmed into the night sky in swoops and dives like flaming birds.

Heidi turned from the window and we all came back and sat down at the breakfast table.

Heidi had a puzzled look on her face.

"What can you possibly give a guy for Christmas who has everything — including all the airplanes they have at the store?" she said.

"Somebody said something about a clock that has a button on it," said Frances. "You push the button and a sexy woman's voice gives you the time. Elvis would love it."

"What are you giving him, Arlene?" Heidi said.

"Well, I brought a shirt down from Chicago," I said. "It's made of cloth but it looks like black leather. What do you think?"

Heidi sighed. "It's perfect. Elvis will look great in that."

"He looks great in any kind of clothes he puts on," I said. "He's one man who's made for clothes. With him it's the man who makes the clothes."

"I'm planning to give him a stuffed donkey," Frances said.

"A *donkey*?" Heidi said.

"Wait a minute," Frances said. "It's real cute. And he never got a stuffed donkey before. I hope he likes it. It's huge and real adorable."

A car swung around the side of the house and stopped. In the headlights we saw Elvis and the guys studying the burned remains of the planes.

Uncle Travis jumped out of the car and came in carrying a big box filled with gifts that fans had left for Elvis down at the gate. He set the box in the dining room by the tree.

I walked with him up to his house to get my Christmas present for Elvis and I brought it back to put it under the tree.

Elvis saw me coming in and said, "Is that for me?"

"Yes, but it's for Christmas," I said, ducking his

reaching hands. "No squeezing, poking or shaking — and you get no hints."

I put it among the other presents under the tree.

He grabbed it with a grin and squeezed it, poked it and shook it near his ear.

"Want me to guess what it is?" he said, teasing me.

"I want you to put it down," I said.

He stood and surveyed the huge pile of gifts with greetings to him in every language under the sun. He shook his head and headed for his bath to wash the gasoline smell off his hands.

"I love Christmas," he said.

He hurried out, humming his favorite Christmas song. It was a negro blues song that he somehow made sound sort of happy.

It's Christmas time, little baby
And the snow is on the ground . . .

CHAPTER 5

On Christmas Eve

And then it came — Christmas Eve.
Elvis' mother came down to the kitchen early and saw me eating grits.

I was putting lots of sugar on them — and salt and pepper on my eggs.

She poured herself a cup of coffee and sat down at the table with me.

"That's the funniest thing," she said.

"What's that, Mrs. Presley?" I said.

"Sugaring your grits," she said. "I never in my life saw anyone do that before."

Miss Minnie came in just then. "Everybody's got their own way of doing things," she said.

She got a pan of food for the chickens and went briskly out the back door. The chickens were already lined up, waiting for her. It was going to be a good Christmas for them, also. Not one of them was going to get their head chopped off and end up on the dinner table this year.

"Isn't it wonderful, how many gifts the fans have brought Elvis?" I said.

Mrs. Presley nodded. "I just wish, though,

that every one of them could come up here and spend a little time with all of us. I know they love Elvis. And we love them, too. I just wish this house was big enough to hold everybody who wants to come see us this year."

She sipped her coffee.

"That would be my Christmas wish if I could make one."

She patted my hand. "I'm glad your mama let you come down and be with us," she said. "We all love you."

It was sort of a restful day. Along toward evening, people began getting dressed up. Some of the Presley family and friends would come for supper and then everyone would be around later when Elvis would open up all his presents.

Some time after supper, cousins and aunts began drifting in. Uncles and close friends.

Elvis, dressed to a tee and looking gorgeous, wandered among them all, joking, laughing. He puffed his cigar and was the most gracious host I had ever seen in my life.

Everyone was spoiling Duke the poodle and Wendell the cat with little Christmas morsels.

Elvis was quietly giving out envelopes containing money as his special Christmas gift to everyone around him.

From time to time, he looked in on his grandmother upstairs and said, "You coming down, Grandma?"

"Yes, son," she'd say. "As soon as I get fixed up."

"I love all my folks," he told me, walking down the hall. "They never can be replaced."

But he couldn't overcome his temptation to have fun with them. One of his favorites was Uncle Vester. Elvis noticed him and grinned. He reached

into an inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out a big fireworks that he called "the whistler." He touched the end of his cigar to the fuse and dropped it quietly in the thick carpet behind his uncle who was dressed beautifully for the evening.

"Oh, no," I said and jumped back away from them.

The thing started howling and whistling. It startled poor Uncle Vester who skipped around and tried to get away from it. But the thing seemed to follow him around the room.

Elvis laughed so hard that he collapsed into one of the dining room chairs as Uncle Vester ran out the back door.

Elvis was like a joyful and carefree child at Christmas. His mood had a way of getting to everyone and the night became a pure delight for everyone there.

Elvis began laughing all over again when Miss Minnie came in and asked, "What was Vester yelling about?"

There was no way that Elvis could restrain himself until Christmas morning to open all his presents. About nine that evening he finally gave himself up to the boyish rapture of ripping into all the presents under the tree. He didn't loosen ribbons carefully — he tore into boxes like an impatient child.

One of the first things that he noticed was the gorgeous stuffed donkey that stood almost hidden underneath the pile of presents behind the tree.

He looked around at the crowd. "There is only one person in this room who would give me a *jackass* for a Christmas present," he said. His eyes stopped on Frances. "Right, Frances?"

Frances blushed. "I thought it was cute."

Elvis walked over to her and tilted her chin up.

Crew cut Elvis signs autographs.

"I love it, Frances. Thanks, darlin'. I love it."

Then he dove into the job of ripping off wraps and tearing open boxes.

Out came rich bed jackets, expensive clocks of all kinds, beautiful pieces of jewelery, shirts in ruffles and shirts with a silken look to them, handkerchiefs of gorgeous materials, framed pictures of celebrities and friends, knicknacks of every kind, in ceramics, stained glass and gold and silver, carved and polished woods, everything you could imagine.

Everything that he came up with almost made you gasp with surprise.

He was constantly thankful and grateful to everyone.

When he came to the package from me, he looked across the mound of crumpled papers and ribbons at me. "For me?" he said.

"For you," I said.

As soon as he opened it and pulled the black "leather" shirt out of the wrapper, he went upstairs to put it on. He came back down, smiling big. He gave me a big hug and kiss.

He looked gorgeous in black leather.

He kept opening packages for hours. From time to time, somebody brought in some of the holiday goodies that sat around the house on plates and in bowls and baskets.

Elvis appreciated everything, no matter how humble.. He saved his greatest expressions of gratitude for the smaller and less expensive gifts that he opened.

When he opened the present from his cousin, Gene Smith and his wife, Louise, he seemed totally thrilled with the set of heavy oak clothes hangers.

"Now, this is something I can really use," he

said, his face just beaming across the room at Gene and Louise. "I really do appreciate this."

He said it again and again, showing the hangers off as if they were the greatest thing he had ever found under a Christmas tree.

Elvis made everyone feel good about what they had given him. The cost didn't seem to matter to him.

I walked outside with Frances for a few minutes, actually to sneak a quick cigaret without Elvis knowing it.

Frances glanced back at the house. "Arlene, do you think Elvis is mad at me about that donkey?" she said.

"Frances, he *loved* that donkey," I said. "You could tell. He really loved it. You know how Elvis is with stuffed animals — and no one ever gave him one of those before. He loved it."

She sighed. "I hope so."

For days, however, Elvis continued to tease Frances about her donkey. He would stop what he was doing and look at her and say, "Frances, were you really trying to tell me something with that donkey?"

Elvis seemed to want to pack as much happiness into his life as possible. After his birthday on January 8 he was to return to Hollywood to complete work on his movie, *King Creole*. Then, when the movie was finished, he was returning to Memphis for his induction into the Army on March 24.

Time seemed to be running out.

Elvis didn't like the change that lay ahead. The uncertainty of it created a kind of dread of leaving behind a world that he was familiar with and loved.

One night, soon after Christmas, we were sitting down in the den with Mack Gurley who was an air traffic controller at the airport. The subject of marriage came up. Mack seemed to like the whole idea.

Elvis shook his head. "Mack, I don't want any of you to get married while I'm gone to the service. If you have to do it, at least wait until after I come home."

I was pouring myself a drink at the soda bar when Mack walked up beside me, later in the evening.

"I was supposed to be getting myself engaged pretty soon," he said quietly.

"Have you told Elvis?" I said.

He shook his head.

"What are you going to do?" I said.

He looked at Elvis chalking a cue stick at the pool table across the hall.

"I guess I'll break it off — until he gets back," he said. He put his glass under the spigot and pulled the handle. "I promised him I would. Does that sound silly?"

"Not to me, Mack," I said. "I know exactly how you feel."

One evening Elvis came through the living room and said to me, "Come on."

We went out and got in his car and he drove down to the front gate. There was the usual mob there. Elvis stopped to sign autographs and talked to everybody. He got out of the car, finally, and started signing autographs on the hood of the car.

After a while, I got tired of sitting in the car. I got out and leaned against the car and waited while he posed for pictures with various fans and visited with them.

We heard car tires squealing. Somebody

stopped their car in the middle of the highway and came running over to Elvis. Elvis glanced at me and shook his head.

We finally got away.

Elvis drove into the downtown area, past some of the places where he had lived when the family first moved up to Memphis from Tupelo.

He slowed as we went by them, looking and remembering things from another life. People stood on the sidewalks under the street lamps, watching us go by, waiting for something to happen.

Elvis did not stop for a single red light. He just slowed at each intersection, checked to see that it was safe to cross and then sped on down the street.

Then we headed south again.

The lights on the limousine swept over the guard house at the front gate when Elvis turned in off the highway. The crowd of fans swept around him like water around an island.

The front bumper of the car stopped inches from the gate.

The gate remained closed.

Elvis flicked the headlights a couple of more times.

Nothing happened. Elvis tapped the horn twice.

His Uncle Tracy came out of the guard house. He peered between the bars of the gate into the headlights.

"It's me, Uncle Tracy," Elvis said. "Open the gate."

Uncle Tracy did not move to let him in.

Elvis leaned out the window and raised his voice. "Open the gate, Uncle Tracy. I want in."

Uncle Tracy shook his head stubbornly. "You

can't go up there now," he yelled. He sounded determined.

Elvis jerked on the hand brake and got out of the car. There was a murmur from the crowd. Elvis walked up to the gate, bathed in his own headlight.

"Uncle Tracy, I am Elvis Presley and I live up there and you have to let me in," he said, starting to laugh.

Even some of the fans were laughing with Elvis now.

Uncle Tracy slowly opened the gate. Elvis got back in the car.

Elvis drove slowly in, shaking his head.

When we got up to the house and went in, Elvis started telling everybody there about the funny trouble we had with Uncle Tracy, trying to get in the gate.

"But listen to this one," he said. "Anita Wood had the same trouble a few days ago. She said she drove up to the gate and told Uncle Tracy, 'It's me!'

"Uncle Tracy looked out and said, 'Who?'

"She said, 'Anita Wood.'

"Uncle Tracy shook his head and said, 'No, Elvis don't need any wood.' "

Elvis laughed so hard that he was wiping tears from his eyes.

Soon after he got up the next morning, he slipped into some very thin leather pants and put on a heavy leather jacket.

He put his motorcycle helmet on the table by us as we both had breakfast.

"I want to ride," he said, finishing off his plate.

He gave me just enough time to let Alberta find me a rubber band to tie my hair into a pony tail.

"Ever been on a motorcycle?" he said.

"Never," I said.

I got on the back and wrapped my arms around his waist and held on for dear life. He swept down the front driveway and out through the fans at the gate without stopping and headed south on the highway.

When we had to stop at a light he liked to watch one particular person, who also had stopped for the light, until they happened to turn around and see him.

He loved to watch the surprise creep into their faces. Then he would smile at them.

He opened up the throttle pretty good when we got clear of the city and down into the rolling hills of North Mississippi.

"How do you like it?" he yelled back at me in the wind.

"I love it," I yelled back.

We passed a sign welcoming us into the beautiful state of Mississippi. Elvis yelled over his shoulder, "You don't mind if I take you over the state line, do you?"

I was fifteen.

"Think of how much trouble I could get into if the wrong people knew about it," he said.

In the rear view mirror I could see him smiling.

We topped a hill and there was the town of Hernando just ahead.

"A lot of people come down here to get married, Arlene," Elvis said. "If a guy's going to get married, this is a good state to get married in. The laws don't go against the men as bad as they do in a lot of states.

Elvis rumbled the big motorcycle around the town square. People waved. Elvis whipped the big machine back out on the highway and headed

north again across the rolling hills toward Memphis — a trip he had made as a child and it had changed his life.

The next evening, one of Elvis' employees sat down by me in the living room and offered to take me for a ride. He said he would show me parts of the countryside around Memphis that he thought I would like..

"Colonel Parker is going to be up here, in a little while," he said. "We won't be able to see Elvis until later."

So I got in his car. We took off down the hill.

It was not very late but it was already getting dark.

It was a nice night. The stars came out as he headed south. He talked about earlier times with Elvis, when both were terribly poor and the future looked pretty gray and empty. I was fascinated.

We were driving down some pretty country road. I had no idea where we were.

He pulled off the road and stopped in front of a big gate. He turned off the lights and slid over in the seat beside me. He tried to start something with me and when I didn't like it, he got angry.

"Get out of the car and walk, if you had rather do that," he said.

I got out and he drove off.

There were no lights anywhere. I didn't see a house or anything. Just all darkness.

I started walking.

A car went by me from time to time. Some drivers would slow down and then go on when I wouldn't look up and talk to them.

Finally, I came out on Highway 51. There was a little store at the intersection. I went in and asked someone the way to Graceland.

One of the customers pointed out the direction. When he was leaving the store he said, "Say, would you like me to give you a ride?"

I thanked him and started off walking up the shoulder of the highway.

I walked all the way to Graceland. When I came in the front door, Elvis saw me.

"What happened to you?" he said.

The guy was sitting there staring at me. I felt sick at my stomach but I didn't say anything.

"Is anything wrong?" Elvis said.

I didn't answer. I just looked at the guy.

"What happened to you?" Elvis said, walking toward me.

I looked past Elvis at him.

Elvis called him over. "What happened out there?" he said.

"Nothing," the guy said.

Elvis looked at me. "Let's have it," he said.

"Well," I said, "he just told me to get out of his car and walk back here. So I did."

Elvis grabbed the guy by the shirt collar and shoved him up against the wall.

"If you ever try a thing like that again with her, *I'll kill you*," he said.

The guy stared at him and nodded.

I went to Chicago soon after Elvis' birthday.

It was hard to believe he was only twenty-three years old.

Elvis was going in the Army soon and it had made everyone around him moody. I called down to Graceland a lot to talk to anyone there. Everything else bored me. And I'd call Elvis out at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Hollywood. He kept saying, "Don't worry, darlin', I'll be home soon. I can't wait to be back there with y'all for a while before I have to leave."

"Buttons" with Elvis.

"Let's ride!"

I'd ask him to tell what he had been doing — and he'd tell me.

Many times he would tell me what *I* had been doing since I talked to him last. It was unbelievable how he knew things.

Then one night he called me. He didn't say who it was or anything. He just said, "I'm coming home."

I was on the next train to Memphis, only a very few days before he was to be inducted on March 24.

On one of the following evenings, while Elvis was still asleep upstairs, I left Graceland to have dinner with Gene and Louise Smith at their home. We didn't know exactly what Elvis' plans were for the evening, yet.

Gene was one of Elvis' real favorites. He had a fantastic sense of humor. He could twist his face into strange looking masks that were hilarious. Elvis could sit and watch him and howl with laughter until his sides hurt — and he would try to imitate every expression Gene came up with.

Gene was the one Elvis often sought out when he was feeling bad and needed help to break the spell. When Elvis was fearful he might start sleep walking again, he would ask Gene to come and stay with him.

That night it was raining hard. A friend of mine had driven me out to Gene's house. It was off on a little side road from Highway 51, the highway that later was named Elvis Presley Boulevard. Gene lived in a small house in a plain little neighborhood of modest homes in the south of Memphis. It was an older house.

There were Venetian blinds on the dining room windows that was just off the living room.

Gene was so funny that night. We almost for-

got that Elvis would soon be leaving us for the Army. It was a thing none of us understood — in the way you never quite understand why a loved one has to die.

We were sitting at the table talking and we heard the roar of a big engine turn in to the driveway. It revved up high and then cut off.

"Motorcycle?" Gene said, getting up and going to the front door. He spread the Venetian blinds and then stepped back and jerked the front door open.

Elvis came in, shaking the rain off his coat. His hair was wet.

"Hi, Gene, Louise," he said. He seemed surprised to see me there.

"I didn't think you were up yet," I said.

"Couldn't sleep," he said.

I couldn't believe what I saw. He had cut his hair. It was no longer than four inches.

He smiled in a mirthless way. "I didn't want some Army barber to have all the fun of cutting Elvis Presley's hair off," he said. "I wasn't going to give them all the pleasure."

It was not quite a full GI haircut but it was getting close. It hurt to see it — but even that tall crewcut looked good on him.

Louise gave him a hug. "Come on in and sit with us," she said. "Have you had supper?"

"Just ate breakfast," he said, smiling.

Another set of headlights whipped into the driveway and rested on Elvis' motorcycle. Rain slanted coldly down through the beams. A car door opened and a man jumped out and ran toward the house, carrying a camera.

Elvis saw him coming.

"He started following me when I came out the

gate," he said. "I know the guy. You can let him in."

A photographer came in the door, stomping rain off his shoes.

"Thanks, Elvis," he said.

He told us that the popcorn industry had just named Elvis the movie star whose movies sold the most popcorn. They had issued a proclamation that said Elvis had been named an Honorary KERNEL on the Mayor's Staff of Popcorn Village, USA.

He also had a plaque with a cob of popcorn, in metal, that was for Elvis.

"Can I get a picture of you with the awards?" the photographer said.

Elvis shrugged and looked at us.

"Get these two girls in the picture with me," he said.

Elvis put his arms around my waist and Louise. I had the scroll and Louise held the plaque with the popcorn cob on it.

The plaque read: *"In recognition of his CORN-spicuous CORN-tribution toward the Progress, PrOP-agation, POP-ularity and POPS-RITE-ness of POPCORN . . ."*

It was dated March 19, 1958, only five days before Elvis was to leave for the Army. It seemed an odd sort of salute. But he had begun to receive awards for everything imaginable.

The photographer thanked Elvis and dashed out through the rain to his car. Tires squealed on wet pavement.

Gene shut the door and made a funny face and said, "KERNEL, won't you sit a spell?"

Elvis immediately relaxed. He settled down on the couch and opened his raincoat.

Everybody kept joking around — but the rain on the roof didn't make it easy.

The "Kernel" with Louise and Arlene.

The next morning, when Elvis stopped in the kitchen for breakfast, a newspaper was neatly folded by his plate.

I was standing behind him when he opened it. I saw the picture of me with "Kernel" Elvis and I nearly died.

"Oh, no," I said. "It's awful."

"What is?" Elvis said, looking over his shoulder at me.

"Every time I try to smile, you see my gums," I said.

He looked at the picture and munched crispy bacon.

"After breakfast," he said, "I'll show you what to do about that little problem."

When he finished eating, he took me upstairs to his bathroom and got out a wash cloth. He got it wet and soapy and he scrubbed my face clean. He pulled my head back so he could do a real good job on me.

"Oh, Elvis," I said. "You've never seen me without my makeup on."

"I'm putting on new makeup," he said. "And I'm going to show you how to smile."

When he finished drying off my face with a towel he got out some makeup and put it on the counter in front of the mirrors. The lights were bright.

He began by putting on a base from a big round container. Then he put on mascara and eye liner which I had never used before.

"A woman should bring her eyes out," Elvis explained.

Heavy makeup was popular on the West Coast, he said.

He stood back, from time to time, to study the effect.

"I'm not a professional makeup man but that will give you an idea of what I have in mind for you," Elvis said. He looked pleased with the result. "You can have the whole thing down pat with just a little practice."

We looked in the mirror. "Well, what do you think?" he said.

I smiled without parting my lips.

He laid the eye liner down and said, "And there's no reason for you to be embarrassed to smile. There's nothing wrong with your smile."

I held my lips together.

"Now, Arlene," he said, "just stand here in front of the mirror and watch what happens."

"All right."

"Now, start smiling but don't allow your lips to go any higher than the top of your teeth," he said.

Elvis was a good, patient teacher.

"It won't come to you overnight," he said. "Every time you are near a mirror, practice and watch yourself. After a while it will come naturally to you to smile the right way."

I began trying it.

He winked. "You're doing good, baby," he said.

He taught the other girls the same things about makeup.

He looked at all of us sitting with him one night and he said, "I'm really proud of you girls."

After that, Elvis liked to boast to people about how he taught us to wear our makeup.

One night, just before Elvis had to leave, Heidi and Frances and I were up in Elvis' room, talking. We were trying to make him feel better.

"Elvis has always been able to talk to us easier than he can to the guys around him," Frances often said. "He can tell us things that he can't tell them."

"He just feels closer to us, don't you think?" Heidi said.

We had made up a crazy little song about ourselves. Elvis had never heard it. We weren't sure how he would react to it. But this seemed the time to go ahead and sing it for him anyway.

We were all sitting on the bed.

Heidi brought it up, about the song.

"Elvis, we've made up this song . . . " she began.

"You made up a song?" Elvis said.

She nodded. "Want to hear it?"

Elvis cleared his throat. "Sure. Go ahead and sing it for me."

The three of us got off the bed and put our arms around each other like a little trio. We hesitated, hoping he wouldn't get mad. Then we began:

"Oh, we're the girls of Graceland
And we don't give a damn.
We're out to have a helluva time
And get into a jam.

The hell with Pat Boyd
Anita Wood, too.
If you don't like our little song,
To hell, to hell with you."

We sang it with all the shrill enthusiasm of a high school pep squad. Elvis rolled over laughing and clapping his hands. He loved it.

The laughing calmed down a little and then I noticed there were tears in Elvis' eyes.

"God knows how much I'm going to miss y'all," he said. "I don't know what I'm going to do without you.

"I love you."

Heidi hugged him. "It's going to be awful for us without you, too," she said. "What will we do when you're gone?"

Her eyes wandered over each one of us and she said softly, "Why do things always have to change like this?"

There was a long silence and we all sort of hung onto each other.

"We won't let them change," Elvis said. "We won't let them."

CHAPTER 6

"Mama's gone."

Toward the beginning of June, Elvis finished his basic training at Fort Hood in Texas. He came home for a couple of weeks furlough.

He had lost a few pounds but he looked beautiful. His hair was its natural color, a light brown with a golden cast to it. It was extremely becoming to him.

He was thrilled to be home.

I came down from Chicago after promising my folks that I would be able to put in some extra study when I got back and it would be easy to make up the two weeks I would be gone.

Elvis played hard for the entire two weeks — and he also worked hard the night he spent in Nashville at a recording studio. He tried to record enough songs to take his fans through the next two years he would be away. It would be a long, dry spell.

Elvis went for days without sleep. The rest of us began to crumble under the marathon of late night movies and skating parties and games at Graceland.

Elvis came downstairs to the den one evening after we all got back from seeing three or four movies in one session. Cousin Patsy Presley had come downstairs only moments ahead of him. She had flopped herself down in exhaustion in a chaise lounge and immediately fallen sound asleep.

Elvis came down the stairs and saw her, limp as a rag doll cast aside.

With the incredible power of his lungs he shouted, *"There'll be no sleeping here tonight!"*

Patsy leaped bolt upright as if a powerful spring had been released in her back. It scared her to death. She looked around with a shocked expression. "God, you could wake up the *dead*!"

Elvis smiled. "Wake up, Pee Pee."

Elvis looked at the stairs with people beginning to come down in search of him.

Some were beginning to look pretty groggy but they were still smiling.

Elvis laughed. "What a bunch of dead heads," he said, taking a pool stick off the wall by the pool table.

"Put on some more records, Frances," he said. "None of my stuff, remember."

We usually mixed some of his records in with the others. As soon as he heard one start he would tell us to reject it and go on to the next one. He didn't like to listen to his own records and we all knew that but we still tried to put some on.

"Don't sneak any more of mine on there!" he kept telling us. "I'm *serious*."

Then we discovered we could sneak one of them on — and get Elvis' attention. We liked that part.

He put down the cue stick and came over.

"Take every one of my records out of that stack," he said. "Get 'em out of here."

We dutifully took them all out and set them aside. Then one of us sneaked one of them back in the stack.

When Elvis heard it come on, he straightened up, came over and took off the record. He walked over to Frances with it and broke it right over her head.

"Well, I guess that will take care of that!" he said, and went back to his pool game.

"Now, maybe, I can play a game of pool without any of that stuff going on," he said.

When his fourteen days were about over, we found him upstairs in his room one day, as depressed as he could be. All the fun had gone out of his life.

He had wanted to charter a bus and bring us all down to Texas with him but that was not going to work out.

"I don't want to leave without you," he said. "One way or another, I'll find a way to get you to Texas.

"I can't go on to Germany without seeing you one more time. There has to be a way."

His mother and father moved down to Texas with him. Lamar went down. Red West and Junior Smith went. Grandma went down. Elvis moved them all into a brick house in Killeen, not far from Fort Hood. He could be home with them at night.

Patsy became suddenly ill. Doctors said she had a rare glandular fever. Her temperature shot up frighteningly and stayed there. She fell into a coma and doctors rushed her to the hospital.

Every day, Elvis and Gladys began calling anxiously from Texas for reports on Patsy's condition. Elvis passed the word to the gang in Memphis and we bought a lot of flowers and sent them up to Patsy's room.

On the fifth day, her temperature stood at 105 degrees. She faintly heard a doctor enter. He spoke bluntly to Cletus and Vester, her mother and father keeping a vigil at her bedside.

"She's really not responding to medicine," Patsy heard him say, "I don't know how to tell you anything else but to pray."

Patsy knew she was going to die.

That night, her parents got down on their hands and knees by her bed and prayed.

During the night, the fever broke.

In the early sunrise, as Patsy began to regain consciousness, she slowly opened her eyes. She looked about.

"I saw all the lovely flowers around me," she said. "I thought, 'Oh, how lovely they are. I'm dead and I've gone to heaven.' I began to think of all the people I had left behind. I thought of all the things they would be doing now without me.

"I said, 'Oh, I'm only sixteen and, God, I'm too young to die.' "

Later in the day, Elvis' mother called from Texas to tell her how much they had worried and how hard they had been praying for her.

A short time before Elvis was to ship out to Germany to join the Third Armour Division, his mother became ill. Elvis made her come back to Memphis to see the best doctors. They immediately put her in the hospital.

Her problem was diagnosed as hepatitis.

Elvis managed to get an emergency leave. He rushed home.

The next day, I called Methodist Hospital and they allowed me to talk to Mrs. Presley. She sounded surprisingly good.

"Hi, honey," she said. "Yes, they've still got me

in here. I'm ready to go home as soon as they'll let me."

I called the hospital the following day and then again in the early evening. Each time, she seemed to be feeling better.

"I'm doing fine, honey," she said. "The doctor says if I keep getting better he'll let me go home this weekend. I'll tell you one thing, as soon as I get home we're going to have a big party."

"Oh, I wish I could be there," I said.

"Maybe we can find a way to get you down here," she said.

Two days later, on August 14, I heard the announcer break into a music show and announce that Elvis' mother was dead.

I was not able to get down to Memphis until the day after the funeral. When I got off the train I went straight up to Graceland.

The feeling in the house was awful. I had never seen anybody grieving as bad as Elvis was.

Elvis was in the living room, walking back and forth. He had his mother's nightgown clenched in his hands. Just holding it to him.

People sat around mutely, unable to help. Elvis had not slept in a long time. They had tried to get him to go upstairs and get some rest. He looked tired and completely worn out.

Elvis kept pacing around the room, crying and talking aloud to his mother as if she were there in the room with him.

"You can't leave me," he said. "You just can't leave me. I need you so much."

He looked around the room and spread his arms. "All this is for you. It's not for me. What good is all this to me if you're gone?"

He looked down at the nightgown that was damp with his tears.

"I'm going to quit show business," he said softly. "I'll completely quit."

He wandered agitatedly around the room. He didn't seem to see any of us. "I'm going to travel a while," he said. "All over the world. I'll never entertain again. I'm leaving show business.

"It's over. That's it."

He held the nightgown up to his cheek.

"I want to get away from all of this," he said. "I want to go somewhere else."

His eyes went up to the ceiling.

"Mama, wake up!" he yelled. "Please, wake up, mama! Come back!"

Nobody knew what to do. We just waited and suffered with him.

A delivery boy came to the kitchen door with sacks of groceries. Elvis had wandered into the kitchen. He began telling the boy how his mother had fallen ill in Killeen. He rushed on about her coming home so she could see her doctors and how they had put her in the hospital. He told in great detail how he had hurried back to Memphis and sat by her bedside at the hospital. He told how the doctors had said she was getting better and that Elvis could come home and rest a while — and how she had died that night.

"He's telling that whole story to everyone who comes in," Heidi whispered. "It breaks your heart to see him like this."

Elvis was still holding onto the nightgown. He wouldn't put it down.

"Mama's gone," he kept telling the delivery boy. "She's gone. She's gone."

The delivery boy backed slowly out of the kitchen, still nodding while Elvis continued to talk.

"Come back, Mama!" Elvis called out.

Frances groaned and put her head in her

hand. It always seemed so beautiful to me — the way Elvis felt free to show his emotions around those he loved. Now it was almost overpowering to see. Never had I seen someone suffer so.

When Elvis returned to Fort Hood we began calling every day or so — from Patsy's house, from Earl's, from Mack's, from Louise's.

Elvis seemed quiet on the phone. We talked to Grandma and Vernon. They told us how deeply depressed Elvis seemed.

They all were going through a bad time.

We began to worry about whether or not Elvis would be able to snap out of it. Before leaving to go back to Fort Hood, Elvis had said he wanted to charter a bus and bring us all down to stay with him a while. Colonel Parker heard about it and vetoed the idea. He said the girls were too young.

"One way or another," Elvis said, "I have to get y'all down there with me a while before I have to go off to Germany."

One day, Earl Greenwood simply announced that he was going down to see Elvis. Dottie Ayers, who was president of a fan club, said she was going with him.

We all wanted to do something. The other girls were already in school. My school in Chicago had not commenced.

"Why don't you call Elvis and ask if you can come on down," a mutual friend named Venus Milloway said. "You can do Elvis a lot more good than Earl and Dottie can. Call him."

"I'm not going to just call and ask him that," I said. "If I had that much nerve I'd have just packed and gone down with Earl and Dottie. I'll wait until all of us can go."

"Then *I'll* call Elvis," Venus said.

That night, Venus called the house in Killeen.

She told Elvis that she knew a man who was driving all the way to Dallas on the following morning.

"Elvis, he's a friend of mine and he'd be happy to give Arlene a ride that far."

She listened a minute and then said, "Oh, yes. You wouldn't have to worry about him. Elvis, he's old enough to be her own grandfather."

She covered the phone and told me, "Elvis is just laughing. He wants to talk to you." She handed me the phone.

"Arlene, I want you down here," Elvis said. "This couldn't have worked out better if I had planned it this way. Go ahead and ride with Venus' friend. When you get to Dallas, have him take you to the Greyhound bus station. Uh, hold on a second."

He was gone from the phone for about two minutes. I could hear him talking to someone. Then he came back.

"Okay, when you get to the bus station in Dallas," he said, "find out what time the next bus leaves for Waco and what time it arrives there. Then call me."

Late the next afternoon, when the sun was setting among the skyscrapers in Dallas, I called Elvis from the Dallas bus station. I gave him the time the next bus to Waco would arrive there.

"When you get off the bus in Waco," he said, "there's going to be a man named Eddie Fadal waiting at the bus door for you. He'll be standing right there when you get off. I've told him what you look like so he'll recognize you. You're to go with him. I can't wait to see you, sweetheart."

Eddie Fadal met me at the station and took me first to his house in Waco. I met his wife, La Nelle, and we had supper. It was too late to drive to Killeen so I was to stay overnight with the Fadals.

Eddie showed me the bedroom I was to use.

"This is the same room Elvis uses whenever he comes to Waco," Eddie said.

The next morning after breakfast we drove to Killeen. We discussed our concern for Elvis' mental health on the way. Eddie said he was glad to see anybody from Memphis arriving to see Elvis.

Miss Minnie met us at the door of the house in Killeen that Elvis had rented for everybody. She gave us both a big hug.

"Elvis isn't back yet," she said. "He had to stay over at the base to be in a parade this afternoon. But I'm looking for him to come in any minute."

We were hardly inside before Elvis came driving up with Vernon and parked in the garage beside the kitchen. Elvis came through the kitchen door. He saw me standing there. He ran over and picked me up and spun me around and around, hugging and kissing me.

"The guy's ecstatic," said Eddie.

"Me, too," I said. I thought Elvis would never put me down.

"Darlin', am I glad to see you," Elvis said.

Eddie had dinner with us and then he left to go back to Waco. Shortly after he left, there was a knock at the front door. Lamar opened it.

Two Army officers came in. Elvis greeted them. They crossed the living room and sat down at the dining room table. Elvis sat across from them but he introduced them to no one.

The officers had a kind of braid on their caps that told me they were officials of some kind. They seemed very nice. They obviously were gentlemen.

They began talking seriously.

I kept reading my magazine and trying not to eavesdrop. But I heard one of the officers telling

Elvis that he could get out of the military service if he really wanted to.

"It's up to you," he said. The officer beside him nodded.

Elvis studied his clasped hands resting on the table.

I thought to myself, *"Tell them you want out!"*

Elvis looked across the table at them. "I would give all the world if I could get out and back home," he said.

"You know, sir, if it had been anyone else sitting here, instead of Elvis Presley, people wouldn't think much about it. But if I told you, 'Yes, I want out,' it could ruin my career. A million mothers would be hollering, 'Yeah, Elvis gets special treatment and *my* son is still in there, having to serve out his time.'

"There's no way I *can* get out now. There's no way I can do that."

They all got up from the table and shook hands. The two Army officers said they really believed Elvis would do what had to be done.

Elvis walked them to the door.

In a minute we heard their car start and back out. Elvis stood at the door until the sound of the car had died away and the evening was silent.

He shut the door and turned and looked at me.

"Well, I guess that's it," he said.

A couple of weeks later and Frances and Heidi jumped on a train for Texas. Elvis sent Lamar in the big white Cadillac over to nearby Temple to pick them up. The house was already getting crowded. Elvis told Lamar to put the other girls in a motel just down the road.

Elvis went down there a few minutes after the girls checked in.

Heidi thought she had plenty of time to bathe and do her hair before they would see Elvis. She jumped out of her clothes and into a hot tub. Frances was in the bathroom talking to Heidi when they both heard Elvis calling out, "Where's my little red-eyed baby?"

Frances had told Elvis, on their last phone conversation, that she had one bloodshot eye.

At that moment, Elvis stuck his head in through the door of the bathroom. Heidi panicked. Frances jumped up and gave Elvis a quick kiss and shoved the door shut. Elvis laughed and told them he'd see them back at the house.

The house that Elvis had rented had three bedrooms only and eleven people living there. Elvis had a bedroom with twin beds. Red West shared that room with him. Miss Minnie had a room with a single bed. When Dottie or I slept in Grandma's room we had to sleep on quilts placed on the floor. One of Elvis' cousins, J. Carol Smith, called Junior, and Lamar Fike stayed there. Vernon, of course, had a bedroom.

Heidi and Frances didn't mind being down at the motel. They made a game out of walking over to Elvis' house. They went barefoot and carried a package wrapped in a big handkerchief on the end of a pole on their shoulder. They wanted to arrive like a pair of young tramps and see what Elvis' reaction would be.

They stopped along the way and asked the people of Killeen if they knew where Elvis lived.

Elvis got a big kick out of them when they showed up at his door and knocked. Elvis grabbed them and came in the house with them.

We all had a happy reunion that night.

At supper Elvis and Red started cutting up. They began passing the bottle of catsup back and

forth. Each time they would do it a little more roughly. Finally, they were throwing catsup on each other.

Miss Minnie yelled at them. She came running from the kitchen with a broom.

Red and Elvis jumped up out of their chairs, hollering and running around the house with Miss Minnie right behind them with her broom, swatting at their rear ends.

Elvis said, "Uh, oh. Now we're in for real trouble, Red. Better keep moving on."

Elvis kept yelling back at his grandmother about how pretty she was when she was mad.

"Now, cut that out, son," she snapped back. You could tell she was pleased.

Grandma was very tall and thin and she could move when she wanted to. Elvis finally got her calmed down and they all went back to the table to finish supper.

Elvis' eyes suddenly got wide and he jumped up. "Hey, there's something I want you to see. Come on outside."

He took we three girls and hurried out the back door, excited as a kid. He had found something and he couldn't wait to share it with us. New things always thrilled him.

There was a woods at the rear of the house. A pretty lake was in the distance. Elvis held up his hands to signal us to walk quietly and keep our voices low.

"They'll be coming right through here, any minute," he said. "There's four deer. They are beautiful. They come walking through here every evening, just about this time. They go over to that lake for a drink of water."

Then we saw them coming. Four deer were

strolling along the path through the woods in single file. Their ears flopped. There was no hint of fear in their graceful movements.

Elvis turned and whispered. "Aren't they beautiful things?" He had an almost religious awe in his eyes.

When the deer had disappeared we started back to the house. Elvis seemed more peaceful than before. It was a relief to see his depression drop away from his face — even if for a little while.

He watched the early rising stars that brightened the eastern part of the sky — and the thin slice of a moon appear. It was a moment of quiet beauty in the world.

"Mother should be here with us," Elvis said and he walked on.

Elvis and Red got out their electric guitars and started playing and singing. The crowd of fans that always hung around outside started singing along with them.

After a while, Elvis stifled a big yawn and shook his head. He put his guitar down in a corner and stretched.

"Well, four-thirty in the morning comes mighty early down here," he said with a sheepish grin. "Let's hit the sack."

In a few minutes, Frances and Heidi started to leave.

"You girls come back in time for breakfast in the morning," Grandma said. "We'll be looking for you."

When they got back to the motel, it was still early. Heidi flopped down on the side of the bed. "I'm not sleepy," she said. "It's just after midnight."

She got up and cracked the shade on the front window and looked outside.

"Hey, there's a swimming pool right outside," she said. "Nobody's using it. Why don't we go for a skinny dip? It's got all the lights on."

Frances said, "Are you crazy? What if they saw us?"

"Nobody's up but us," Heidi said.

In a few minutes, they walked out to the pool in their nighties and jumped in. They took off all their clothes. A car went by from time to time.

They got nervous and started giggling and they made a dash for their room.

They sat on their bed for a few minutes, covers pulled up over them, waiting for somebody to come and pound on their door. Nothing like that happened. They began to relax and laugh about what they had done.

The next day, when Elvis got home from the base, they couldn't wait to tell him about their midnight skinny dip adventure.

Elvis was floored.

"I cannot believe you girls would do a dumb thing like that," he said. "Do you have any idea what kind of publicity you would get if the papers found out about it? Can't you just see the headlines now: 'Elvis' Girlfriends Take Midnight Skinny Dip At Local Motel.' "

He just looked at them and shook his head. They sat quietly as if they were being called down by their high school principal.

After a minute, Elvis' face suddenly relaxed into a big grin. Then he started laughing.

"The motel office was right out there near the swimming pool?" he said.

Frances nodded, feeling easier because Elvis was laughing. "I don't know why the night manager didn't ever see us," she said.

"When we got back to our room," Heidi said,

"we got to wondering what he would have done if he had come out there and seen us."

Elvis broke up laughing. "Oh, no."

He was serious again. "That really was a very foolish thing for y'all to be doing," he said. "You don't know who's staying in a place like that. You don't know who's renting those rooms next to yours. Anything could have happened to you. You know that?"

He suddenly burst out laughing again.

During the daytime, Elvis managed to cover up his grief. Sometimes, especially during the night, it might break through. Privately, and inwardly, he suffered badly.

Sometimes he would be talking to us, hugging on us while we sat in his lap and talked to him. A sadness would hit him like a sudden cloud. His eyes would fill with tears.

One evening I found him in the bathroom with his hands over his face.

"Are you all right, Elvis?" I said.

He nodded but did not turn around. "I guess I'll have to be," he said in a muffled voice.

We put our arms around each other for comfort and stood there a long time.

"I love you, Elvis," I said.

"I know you do," he said.

"I wish there was something I could do to take all the hurt away," I said.

"I know you do," he said. "I could never get through this without y'all."

Elvis and Red sang a while that night. When Elvis got up and headed toward his bedroom, I whispered to Heidi and Frances, "Hey, let's get out of here and grab a fast cigaret before Elvis comes back."

When we came back inside I went to the

kitchen to get a drink. Vernon and Elvis were standing by the sink. Their arms were around each other. They were crying.

"Oh, God, what'll we do?" Vernon said.

I backed out of the room. They didn't know I was there.

"Where's your drink, Arlene?" Miss Minnie asked me when I walked back into the living room.

I told her, so the others wouldn't hear, "Vernon and Elvis are in there. Crying."

She nodded. "It's hard on them," she said. "I wish Elvis could have a little more time for his heart to heal before he has to go off over there to Germany. He's not had time to be ready for that change."

"He sure hasn't," Junior said.

"He knows he has to," Red said.

In the mornings, after Elvis left for the base, I always helped Miss Minnie make up all the beds. One morning I saw a little bottle of tiny purple pills on Elvis' dresser. I was curious to know what they were. I took one of them out and kept it. Later, when I went back to Chicago, I showed it to my uncle who was a doctor. He told me they were very mild tranquilizers which would have been prescribed at the time of Elvis' mother's death.

In the mornings, there in Killeen, Elvis was easily awakened. You could come in and say, "Elvis, it's time to get up." He'd rise up in his bed and say, "Okay."

It seemed that you could drop a pin and he'd open his eyes and look at you.

Sometimes, during the dead of night, Elvis would get up quietly and walk about the house.

One night I was trying to go to sleep. I never could get to sleep quickly. I was just lying there.

I heard the door open. It scared me to death.

Arlene, left, with "Texans."

At first, I was afraid to open my eyes and look to see who it was. When I got my eyes open, Elvis was standing there looking at me. He stood in the doorway only a moment. Then he backed out and quietly shut the door.

I told Vernon about it the next day while Elvis was at the base.

"Elvis does that sometimes," Vernon said. "He'll go around checking to make sure everybody is all right. He'll wake up in the night and start to worry about everybody."

It was a small thing for Elvis to do — check up on all of us at night — but little things were important to him.

I told Heidi and Frances about Elvis' night walks.

Heidi smiled softly. "Elvis is so sad now — and so sweet to all of us. He's sweeter to me than I have ever known him to be."

"Me, too," said Frances.

One evening, someone Elvis had known in Hollywood called him. She said she was coming to see him. Elvis got a trapped look on his face. The girl told him the time her plane was arriving in Dallas. She asked him to send someone to meet her.

I was sitting on his lap in the living room and I heard the whole conversation, from both ends.

When Elvis hung up the phone I said, "Elvis, why didn't you tell her that this wasn't a good time for her to come?"

"I didn't know what to tell her," he said. "She put me on the spot."

The girl was one of the strangest people I ever met. She kept telling Elvis he needed to take vocal lessons. To bug her, he pretended to forget lyrics and he would turn to me to give them to him. One

evening, she even told him he needed work on his guitar.

"Just shut up," Elvis snapped back.

She got up and went in the bedroom and slammed the door.

Heidi and Frances moved in with us for their last two nights before they had to go back home to Memphis. Elvis was leaving for Germany shortly and he didn't want them to be away from him even for two nights, if he could help it. The girls slept on the floor in the den in the rear of the house.

The morning before they left for home, we all piled in the car with Vernon and just drove around the countryside. Sometimes Vernon would be humming something softly, almost under his breath. I kept listening, trying to figure out what the tune was. Finally, I did. It was "Corine, Corina."

After supper that night, Elvis and Red played and sang a little while and then Elvis put down his guitar and walked out with this strange woman from California.

Frances looked after them with a cloudy expression.

"What is it, Frances?" I said.

"I think I know," Heidi said softly.

"I used to be nothing but *thrilled*," Frances said. "Now, sometimes, I feel jealous."

We all went out on the patio and cracked some watermelons and ate them. After a while, we came back inside.

Frances sat there moodily. Then she got up and stalked back to the patio. She picked up watermelon rinds and threw them at a low brick wall at the side of the patio.

She came back inside and stood looking at us. "I think I got it out of my system," she said.

No one said anything.

Heidi and Frances had been gone a couple of days when Elvis came in from the base and told us privately, "Be ready tomorrow when I get home. We're taking this girl and putting her on a plane in Dallas. I've had just about enough."

We cheered and Elvis grinned at us. Everybody instantly felt good again.

The next afternoon, Elvis drove his red convertible. The girl and Red rode in the front seat with him. Lamar was in the car trailing. I rode with him.

Lamar and I watched them start playing a crazy game that Elvis had invented. What you do is tap a person on the forehead and they have to do the first goofy thing they think of.

I tapped Elvis on the forehead one evening and he hesitated a moment, then went to the front door of the house and let in about a hundred of the fans who were hanging out there in Killeen.

Elvis watched them pouring in and said, "*Now* what do I do, Arlene?"

As Lamar and I watched Elvis and Red playing the game in the car ahead of us, we saw Elvis tap Red on the forehead.

Red turned and actually opened the door of the car on his side and pretended he was going to step right out — and the car going eighty miles an hour down the highway.

Elvis grabbed at him and hauled him back inside the car. Red tapped Elvis on the forehead. Elvis shoved open the door on his side and pretended to step out. It was so frightening to watch.

"Oh, hell!" Lamar said. "Why does he like to play games like that?"

Nobody slept much on the night before Elvis was to leave on a train bound for the port of

embarkation for Germany.

The next night as his departure time approached, we got into two cars and drove to Fort Hood.

There was a long row of buses waiting to carry the troops to the train that sat on tracks inside the base a few miles away. Elvis was going to try to ride to the train in our car.

Elvis saw us drive up and he came over. He stuck his head in the car and said, "I have to ride one of the Army buses. Let's all wait to say our goodbyes until we get to the train. I don't want to say them like this."

I watched Elvis get on a bus. In the dark, I counted and I saw that it was the sixth bus in the line that he boarded. I just didn't want to lose track of what bus he was riding on. That would make it easier to find him when we drove up.

The troops got off the buses quickly and onto the train as soon as they got there. We tried to spot Elvis getting off his bus. Then we saw him waving at us from the other side of the track.

We started to run over there and soldiers with rifles aimed at us got in our way.

"You can't cross these tracks," they said.

"But this is Elvis' daddy and grandma," Lamar said.

Elvis was watching. He had not known we would be unable to get to him.

It was horrible. We all were crying. Vernon was crying and so was Grandma.

Elvis just stood there looking across at us and yelling, "Goodbye." He was throwing kisses. "I love y'all."

Then he had to get on the train. He went to a window where he could see us and he waved.

Then the train started moving and we got hysterical. He wanted to reach out to us and we wanted to reach out to him.

"I love ya," he yelled.

As far down the track as you could see, there was his hand waving to us.

Then it was gone. It was all darkness.

We got back in the cars and drove back to the house. Nobody said a word. When we walked in the house, there was a strange feeling in the air.

It came time to go to bed and we all went off to our different rooms. Elvis had told me to sleep in his bed when he was gone. Anita Wood, who had come down for the last weekend, lay down in Red's bed and began reading a book.

I was holding onto my pillow when suddenly the lights in the room blinked off for a couple of seconds and then came back on. I thought nothing of it until they went off again for a couple of seconds, then came back on. Then they did it a third time.

I sat up in bed. "What's going on?" I said.

Elvis' grandmother and father came into the room. Then Lamar came in with Red and Junior.

The lights blinked off and on for a fifth time. Then they blinked off and on again for the sixth time.

"Elvis got on the sixth bus when he went to the train," I said.

Lamar yelled, "He got on the sixth car on that train! He's telling us goodbye right now."

Vernon said something to Grandma and she nodded.

"He's telling us," said Grandma.

I could feel the hair on the back of my neck rising.

"Mama's gone."

A chilly drizzle of rain was falling on the gray steel web of tracks in the giant railroad yard in Memphis when Elvis' troop train stopped there.

Railroad men said the troop train would have to wait there for a few hours.

George Klein found out the train was standing in Memphis and he called Heidi and Frances and some others.

Heidi told me about how they walked across acres of empty railroad tracks and seeing Elvis standing alone on the back end of the train, watching them come toward him.

"He stood on the bottom step of the car," she said.

"He had tears in his eyes and he reached down and pulled us up beside him. We all hugged and kissed and wept on shoulders.

"'I was afraid no one would know I was here,' Elvis said.

"No one had an umbrella so the rain just kept falling on us.

"The Cisco Kid was doing some kind of show in Memphis. He found out Elvis was down there and he walked out to speak with him. Then he went back to his car and drove off.

"The whole thing was so sad. All that Elvis had worked so hard for was ending up there in a lonesome railroad yard in a cold rain. With little to look forward to but eighteen months away from home.

"We heard some people on the front end of the train yell. Then the train made some booms and it started to move forward.

" 'I love y'all,' Elvis kept saying. He hugged us. 'I already miss you. What'll it be like over there?'

"Then we saw Patsy. She was running and

stumbling across the tracks, trying to get there before the train began moving too fast.

"Elvis looked at her trying to hurry across all those tracks and not fall.

"Tears came to his eyes.

"Patsy got there just in time to reach out her hand and touch his that reached down to hers.

"Then he was gone.

"Patsy stood crying and waving.

"We huddled up to each other on the tracks and watched. Elvis stood with a hand raised to us for as long as we could see the train."

The soldier. . .

. . . writing home from the field.

CHAPTER 7

A Letter From Germany

I wrote him every day and telephoned him as often as I could.

On one telephone call he told me that some of his letters were not getting out.

"Someone in the mail service took my name off the envelope where I had written a return address," he said. "They took it as a souvenir. Can you believe that? I told daddy not to put my name on the envelope from now on.

"And people are listening in on my overseas phone calls. I can hear them. I have to stop and tell them to get off my line so I can have some privacy for a change."

He told me he was thinking about taking karate lessons.

"It's something I can do at night," he said.

"Are y'all being good?"

In early November I got a letter from Vernon. It was dated November 4. Vernon enclosed a picture postcard that showed the Hotel Gruenwald in Bad Nauheim where they were staying. Vernon had drawn a line around the top floor of the old hotel.

On the back of the postcard he wrote: This is where we are staying. We have all the top floor. Just thought you might like to see.

His letter read:

Dear Arlene,

Just a few lines to say hello and let you hear from us. We are doing very well. We miss y'all very much. Elvis and myself talk about y'all and say how we would love to see y'all.

Elvis is out in the field for about six weeks or until the 20th of December. He is about 200 miles from here.

Germany is lonesome around here for me. Not much to do here. Germany is a very nice place. They are nice, too. But we had rather be back in the good old USA.

Sure would love to be back there for Christmas but that, I guess, is impossible. So we'll just make the best of it over here.

Please, tell Mrs. Drew and everybody hello for us. She was so nice to all of us and we appreciate everyone of you very much.

And we'll be longing for the time when we can see you all again. If we don't get to write you again before Christmas, we wish everyone a very merry Christmas and good health.

Well, Arlene, that's about all for this time. So take care of yourself and be good until we see you again.

Sincerely,

Vernon and Elvis

A few days later, Frances got a letter from Elvis that was addressed to the whole gang in Memphis. The envelope was marked November 14.

Nov. 4 / 1958

Dear arlene

Just a few lines to say hello and let you hear from us we are doing Nowell we miss you'll very much Elsie and my self talk about you all and say how we would love to see you'll Elsie is out in the field for about 6 weeks or until the 20th of Dec. he is over 200 miles from here it is pretty lonesome around here for me not much to do here germany is a very nice place the are nice to but we had rather be back in the good old U.S.A. sure would love to be back there for christmas but that I guess is impossible so we will just make the best of it anyhow please tell mrs. drew and everybody we said hello for us she was so nice to all of us and we appreciate everyone of you very much and will be looking for the time when we can see you all again if we don't get to see you again before Christmas we wish Everyone a very merry Christmas and good health will arlene That about all for this time so take care of yourself and be good until we see you again

sincerly Vernon & Elsie

Vernon's letter. . .

In it, Elvis said, "I guess I miss mother more over here than anything because I am just now realizing she won't be here anymore."

At the bottom of the letter he wrote, "All my love, Frances. Love you, kid. Elvis Presley."

Frances called from Memphis and read the letter to me.

I couldn't bring myself to date a lot while Elvis was in Germany. I stayed at home. At one point, I had some foolish ideas about working my way over to Germany on an ocean liner, working on the ship. A Memphis girlfriend and I spent many long hours planning such a trip. We were ready to contact a shipping company when her family discovered it and told her to forget it.

Mother kept saying, "Arlene, why don't you go out with some nice young men? I just hope Elvis doesn't ruin your life."

What a crazy idea, I thought.

Jean Drew called one evening and asked me to come over. She and Pam were placing a call to Elvis. I could join in.

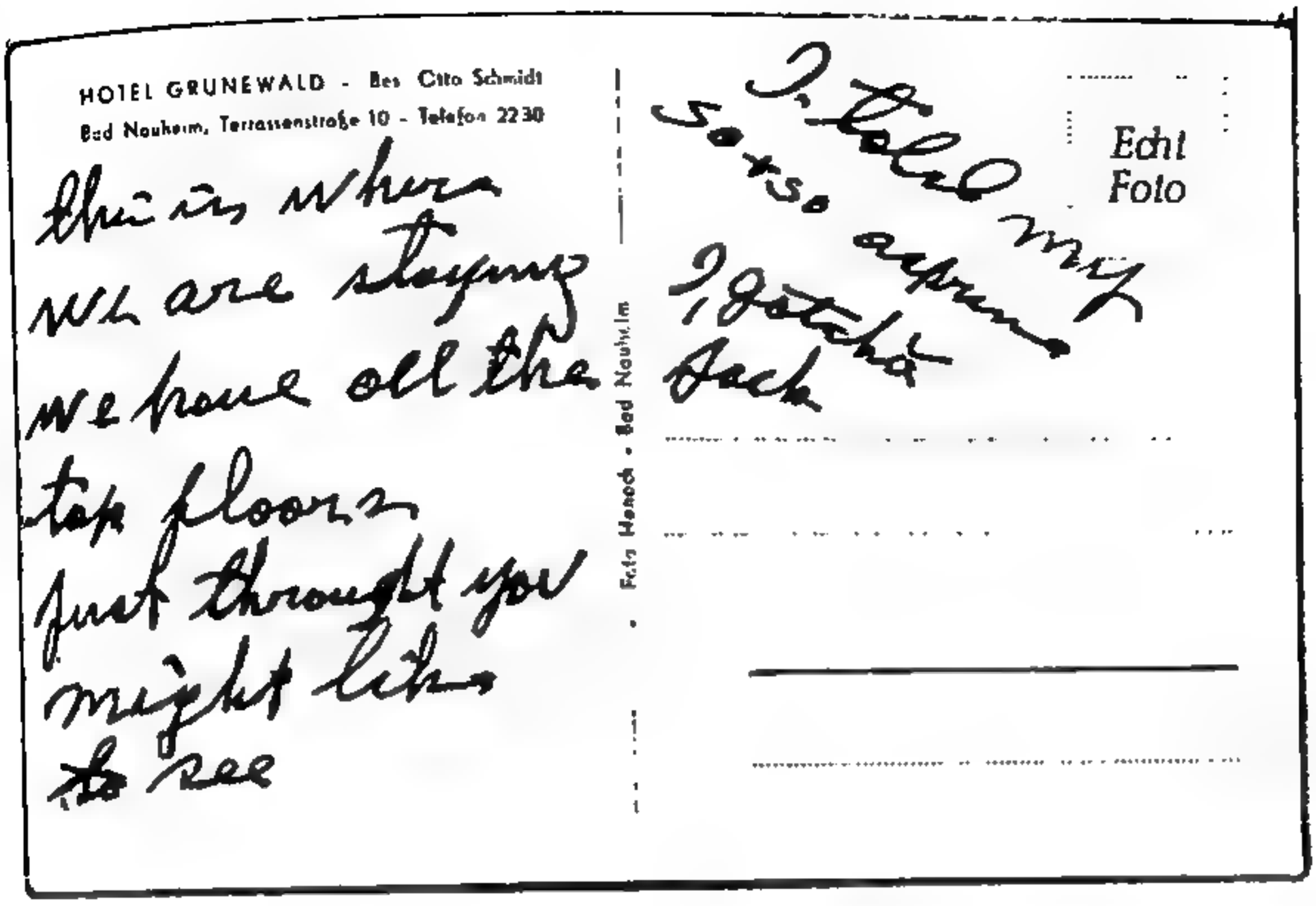
That became a monthly ritual. I called him once a month, at least. Each time Jean called him she would invite me to come over and join them.

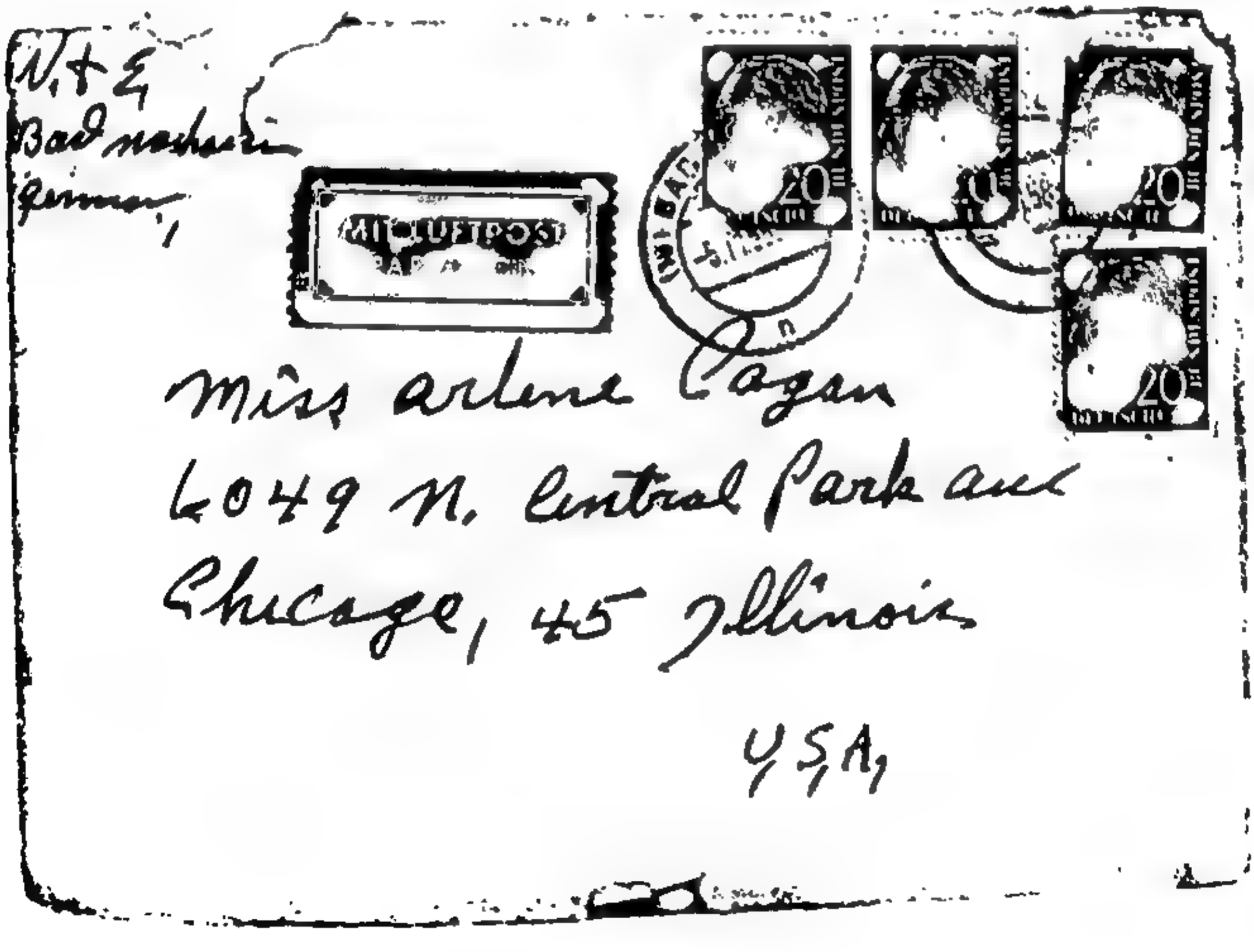
On one of the calls, Elvis said, "Arlene, you'll never believe this. I don't know what to do about it. Here I am, thousands of miles away from Graceland and it's driving me crazy."

"What is?" I said.

"Black ants," he said. "They called and said black ants are taking over Graceland. I left orders for a guy to take care of it but he hasn't. Now they're calling me about it. I may have to send somebody back over there just to take care of a bunch of black ants."

Elvis talked to Jean as if she were the mother


HOTEL GRUNEWALD - Bes Otto Schmidt
Bad Nauheim, Terrassenstraße 10 - Telefon 2230
Here is where we are staying we have all the top floors just thought you might like to see
Echt Foto
Fritz Hench - Bad Nauheim



. . . and postcard.

he no longer had. He could cry on her shoulder and talk to her about his most painful problems. Sometimes she would sit listening on the phone and tears would well up in her eyes. She would look at me and whisper, "Elvis is crying."

It was hard to think up new things to write about every day. He wanted to hear about everything we did. He wanted to keep up with us and he had a real need to feel we still cared about him. I racked my brain for things to tell.

I tried to think of something funny that would make him smile. I began making a list of things that began with the phrase "Can you imagine . . ." They were things that poked a bit of fun at family members and friends alike.

"Can you imagine Uncle Vester guarding Tommy Sands' front gate? Can you imagine Lamar in a bikini? Can you imagine Vernon bouncing Johnny Cash on his lap?"

Elvis loved it and told me to send him more.

As Christmas came nearer I knew I had to be in Memphis for the holiday. There would be things and people to remind me of him.

Chicago was almost lost in a swirling snowstorm the day I was to leave for Memphis. It was horrible. Jean and Pam took me out to the airport. We nearly went off the road a dozen times.

Air traffic controllers couldn't tell me, at first, if there would be any planes getting into the air. I decided to wait at the terminal. If anything *did* fly to Memphis, I meant to be on it.

Watching the snow come down reminded me of Elvis' mother. She used to say that if it snowed in Memphis when Elvis was gone, she always went outside and gathered up enough in a pan to make snowballs for Elvis to see when he came back. She put them in the freezer of the refrigera-

tor to keep. Elvis loved to see it snow at Graceland.

Finally, my plane taxied onto the snow covered runway and we took off for Memphis.

The whole Memphis gang got together and partied night and day during the holidays. The happiest moments were when somebody would remember something Elvis had said or done the past Christmas — or anytime.

It was the next thing to having him there with us.

As soon as I got back to Chicago I called Elvis in Germany and told him about what all had happened.

I told him about the bad snowstorm and how you couldn't see anything the day we took off in Chicago. That made him angry with me.

"Don't you realize you're crazy to try to fly in weather like that?" he snapped. "You should have waited and gone down later." He paused, then said, "Who'd you stay with down there?"

"Frances' folks," I said. "Earl's folks. At Heidi's."

He laughed. "You must have had a blast. I can't wait to see y'all again. Is everybody being good?"

"They're sure trying to, Elvis," I said.

A few months later, the gang in Memphis read in some of the fan magazines that Elvis was seeing a girl named Elisabeth Stefaniak plus a typist named Margrit Buergin. That really upset Frances and Heidi. So, when Tommy Sands came to town in concert, they thought of a way to make Elvis jealous.

Frances told me that they all got together with Tommy at Chenault's Restaurant for a party — and had Earl Greenwood make a tape of it and sent it to Elvis in Germany.

Not only would Elvis be jealous of all their attention to Tommy Sands. Holding the party at Chenault's, a place that Elvis thought of almost as his own, would make it even worse.

What made it more complicated for Elvis was that Tommy was dating a girl named Melinda who had been Anita Wood's roommate when Elvis began dating Anita. Lamar had dated Melinda and fallen head over heels in love with her. Then Elvis began seeing Melinda quietly.

"Then we sort of slipped some things in on the tape to tell Elvis we heard he was dating in Germany and maybe we were doing a little of that over here while he was gone," Frances said.

"We got a real reaction from the tape, all right," Frances said. "I got a letter back immediately from Red West in Germany. He called me everything in the book. He told me, in pretty clear language, that I wasn't doing right by Elvis.

"There was no doubt that Elvis was a little hurt."

Not long after that, Elvis told me on the phone that Germany didn't have Reese's Peanut Butter Cups — the confection made of peanut butter and chocolate.

"I have searched all over Germany for them," Elvis said. "Can you believe they don't have them over here. I'm about to go crazy for some. Would you send me a couple of boxes?"

I packaged four or five boxes of them and took them down to the post office.

The next time I talked to him, after the candy arrived, he told me what happened to them.

"Honey, they were all melted," he said.

"You mean you couldn't eat them?" I said.

"I didn't throw them out," he said. "Man, I got a knife and scraped them all up and ate every bit of them."

CHAPTER 8

Coming Home

I was watching the calendar as closely as Elvis was. A few months before he was to come home I moved permanently to Memphis and found a secretarial job with an insurance company in an office downtown.

At night, we sat around at the home of this or that member of Elvis' gang. We wondered what it was going to be like with him back after two years away. After all this time, would he still feel the same about us or would he want new faces around him?

"Don't you know he's wondering the same thing?" Heidi said.

We started talking about where we would see him for the first time when he arrived.

"I think we ought to all be standing down at the front gate when he drives up," Frances said. "It'll be just like old times for him. Like nothing has changed."

"I can't wait until he gets to the house," I said. "I'm going down to the train station. Somebody should be right there waiting for him when he steps off that train."

"I'll drive you down there," Mack Gurley said.

"I'll ride down with you," said Earl Greenwood.

We three were standing there, looking between the metal bars of the gate when Elvis' train pulled into the station. It seemed like an eternity before Elvis appeared.

"Oh, Mack, look!" I said.

My heart nearly burst at the first sight of Elvis stepping down from the train in his dress uniform with white gloves, that beautiful smile and waving at the photographers.

"Is he going to see us over here?" I said.

"This is the best place we can be," Earl said.

We could see Elvis looking around. Then he spotted us and he came through the crowd to where we were. He reached his hand between the bars and put it on mine. Then we kissed between the bars.

"I almost didn't recognize you," he said. "You look so . . . grown up." He smiled. "Hi, Mack. Earl."

"Well, I sure recognized you," I said.

He seemed so tall and serious in his uniform.

"I'll be going out to Graceland in a minute," he said. "It won't be the same. Mother won't be there this time. She's the only part of my life that is missing now. Everybody else is here. I hate to go back in Graceland and know she's not there. It's going to feel so strange."

I told him the rest of the gang was waiting at the front gate.

"They thought that would be the best place to see you first," I said. "I just couldn't wait that long."

"I couldn't, either," Mack said. Earl nodded.

Elvis smiled.

With Eddie Fadal.

"I wish I could go back home with you guys," he said. "But they've got me riding in a police squad car for security." He squeezed my hand. "See you tonight."

We ran back to Mack's car and jumped in. We waited. Elvis finally got in the squad car and they pulled out of the train station. We followed them.

In a press interview, after he talked to us at the gate, they asked him why he didn't get off the train before it got into the station. Elvis said, "I wanted to ride all the way in because I knew some personal friends would be waiting for me here."

We drove all the way out to Graceland alongside his squad car. He rode in the front seat on the passenger side.

Elvis was throwing me kisses, shaking his head in disbelief and smiling across at us.

Earl said, "Elvis sure looks great. Just a lot thinner."

At one point, I put both of my hands over my face in total disbelief that Elvis was finally back in our sight.

There was a big roar from the crowd jammed at the front gate when the squad car swung off the highway and eased up the driveway. Elvis waved and called to Frances and Heidi and some of the others who were all there yelling and crying.

"I'll see you tonight," Elvis called and he kept waving back at them all the way up the hill.

Heidi and Frances and the others swarmed around us in Mack's car. They asked all kinds of questions about Elvis. What he had said. How he seemed to feel. What his reaction had been when he saw us at the station. What he said to us.

"I was worried when I saw him step down from the train," I said. "His face was thin and

drawn. I never saw him so thin before. His grandmother has been cooking for him all this time. I can't understand why he's that thin."

Frances smiled. "We'll get him to feeling better."

"With people around him who love him, he'll come bouncing back," Heidi said.

"Arlene, what did he say to you?" Frances said.

"Well, he thought I had grown up a lot," I said. "I have my hair in a different style than when he left. He's used to seeing me with my hair down long. This French twist is new to him. I forgot to ask him what he thought."

"Elvis will tell you to put it back the way it was," Frances said. "He doesn't like change."

The house was noisy with excitement that night. We were all hugging each other and hugging Elvis. Laughing. Having a ball. Telling Elvis all the funny things, the dumb things, the sad things that had happened while he was gone. We had tried to tell him everything in the letters but so much had fallen through the cracks and been lost.

"We're going to pick up right where we left off," he told everybody.

He seemed totally happy again. Graceland had been left just the way it was when he went into the Army. He kept walking around, looking at everything and at us, shaking his head and repeating, "I can hardly believe I'm finally back."

We just spent the whole night long, trying to get used to the wonderful feeling that Elvis was home and we were with him again.

He sat down beside me on the couch in the living room.

"Arlene, darlin', I kept a lot of your letters out on my dresser," he said. "One of the guys I met

over there was Joe Esposito. He's from Chicago. He's coming to work for me.

"He saw all your letters with the Chicago postmark and he asked who you were.

"I told him about you. I gave him your phone number in Chicago if he happens to be there when you are."

Somehow, I didn't like that.

"Are you trying to get rid of me, Elvis?" I said.

"What do you mean, Arlene?" he said.

"Are you trying to introduce me to some nice young man from my own hometown?" I said.

He burst out laughing. "Oh, no, darlin'. I didn't mean it that way. Honest, I didn't. Joe is a good man and he's going to be a lot of help to me around here. I want you to get to know him."

He started laughing again. "Arlene, you know, you're *crazy*. But I love you."

Near dawn, people started leaving to go to work.

Elvis told them all to come back the next night wearing pants.

"We're going skating," he said. "I can't wait to get back over to Rainbow and get my skates on."

Elvis had been hugging and kissing us all night. We were afraid to let go. He seemed to feel the same way.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'm home."

The last of the guests were leaving and he told us, "Don't y'all leave. Come upstairs a few minutes."

It was hard to believe, after nearly two years away, to walk into Elvis' bedroom and see him sitting propped up there with a huge pillow. With the radio playing quietly. The lights soft.

We sat around him on the bed.

He reached out and touched us. "I've missed

you so much," he said. "Sometimes I wondered if this moment would ever come. Without your letters and talking to you on the phone, I don't think I could have made it. At times, I was afraid you wouldn't be here when I got home again. Thank God, you're all here, now."

We all hugged him and loved him.

Frances blurted out what was on all our minds.

"Elvis, did you meet any girl you still feel serious about?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No, Frances. I didn't. Don't let those newspaper stories fool you. They made most of that stuff up."

"Have your feelings about marriage changed?" I asked.

"I'll not get married before I'm thirty — if then," he said. "I want to have kids some day — two boys and two girls. But I have no plans to get started on that for quite a while.

"You know how I always wished I had a little sister. It was lonely for me, growing up as an only child. I don't want to have my child to grow up alone."

If he waited until he's thirty, then it would be another five years before Elvis would get married.

"Tell us about Priscilla," Heidi said.

"Priscilla is a beautiful girl," Elvis said. "She has some of the most beautiful eyes I ever saw on a woman."

"Did you know her long?" I said.

"I met her just six weeks before I shipped out," he said.

He closed his eyes and leaned back against the pillow. "I thought about y'all so much in Germany," he said. "God, it's so good to be back."

He began to smile.

"You know, Germany is an amazing place," he

said. "Some people still keep cows in their basement."

He nodded. "That's right. Cows in their basement. In the old days, I think it was to help heat the house."

"Did you learn to speak German?" Frances said.

Elvis laughed. "You know, sometimes they would try to talk to me in German. I didn't understand a word they said — and I *know* they didn't understand a word of English I said. I could tell them the most outrageous things and they would just smile and act very pleased. I told a German sergeant that he had a face like a baboon. He smiled and thanked me like I had called him Clark Gable or Jimmy Dean. It was the funniest thing."

"How old is Priscilla?" I said.

"She's fourteen," Elvis said.

That was our age when Elvis first asked us to be part of his gang.

After a while, we all went down the back stairs to the kitchen. Elvis wanted a glass of milk and a piece of cake.

"Elvis, you got too skinny. You need to be fattened up some," I said.

Elvis shook his head. "This is the perfect weight for me," he said. He pulled a can of Metrical out of the refrigerator, opened it and filled a glass at his plate.

"This keeps your weight down," he said. "You can drink one of these and eat all you want and never put on any weight."

Patsy said, "Elvis, that's not exactly the way it works."

"What do you mean, Pee Pee?" he said. "Of course, it is."

Patsy shook her head. "No, you drink a glass

GIs shed for civvies.

of that *in place of* the meal," she said. "Not *plus* the meal."

"Patsy's right," I said. "If you eat a meal, the Metrical is just *adding* calories."

He shook his head doggedly. "No, darlin'. This glass of Metrical allows you to go ahead and eat everything you want and not put on any more weight."

I picked up the can and read what was printed on it.

"This label tells you," I said.

He drank the rest of the Metrical and dug into the cake.

"I don't want to talk about it anymore, Arlene," he said.

"Okay, but it'll just make you fat," I said.

"I don't want to talk about it anymore," he said.

When we finished eating we all went outside. Elvis wanted to just stroll around and enjoy the feeling of being back home at last.

He looked over to the south of Graceland. There had been nothing but woods there only a short while ago. Now the place was entirely built up with new homes.

"I planned to buy some of that land when I got back home," he said. "I never dreamed it would all be built up this soon. I wish now that I had gone ahead and done it before I left." He looked at all the houses. "Well, it's too late now."

We went on around to the west side of the house. Elvis looked toward the highway and beyond.

"At least, all of that, over there, is still country and pretty," he said.

"I love the privacy. Graceland sits so far back from everything. When we used to live on Audu-

bon Drive, people were knocking on our front door all the time. I wanted to get out here, away from all that. I love those fans down there but I need privacy sometimes."

Jean Drew and Pam couldn't get to Memphis to help welcome Elvis home. They called me.

"Arlene, you've got to do something for us," Jean said. "Buy a nice layer cake for Elvis. No, make it two — one chocolate and one coconut."

Coconut was Elvis' favorite.

When I came in with the cakes wrapped inside a bakery box, Elvis spotted me carrying something.

"What's that, Arlene?" he said, eyes brightening, a little grin at the corners of his mouth.

"Is that something for me?" he said. "Did you bring that for me?"

"Yes, Elvis, this is for you," I said.

He followed me into the kitchen like a puppy dog. I slid the first cake out of the box.

"My favorite," he said.

"Jean and Pam sent it," I said.

"What flavor is the other one?" he said.

"Chocolate," I said, pulling it out.

They were the half-size layer cakes.

Elvis got a glass of milk and sat down in the kitchen and cut off a fat slice of the coconut cake.

He ate that and cut off another huge chunk.

"Anybody want a slice?" he said, looking around.

They were all eyeing the chocolate cake I was eating. So Elvis picked up the remainder of the coconut cake with both hands and ate the entire thing.

"You'll be sick," I said.

"I won't be sick," he said.

He didn't get sick. Neither did he get hungry again for quite a while.

Elvis got up and went out to the front porch and looked down to the front gate. A mob was down there, talking to the gate guard and looking up at the house.

Elvis went back in to the kitchen and punched the phone extension down at the gate.

"How many girls are down there?" he said. "Nearly a hundred? Let them all come up."

In no time, the house was full of women. They were everywhere you looked or went.

Elvis would wander through the house and talk and answer questions. He never wanted to talk about the entertainment world. Once in a while, he would ask a girl, "Are you a reporter?" He didn't want any publicity about his home life at all.

An entire room full of girls would go silent when Elvis walked in.

"Why do they always quit talking when I come in the room?" he whispered as he sat down by me.

He was the most exquisite looking man any of us had ever seen. A dozen times a day, different girls would say, "Elvis, you look even better than you do in the movies."

Elvis would blush!

He was always natural. There was no pretense about him. Sex appeal just oozed out of him all over — all the time. He walked straight as a soldier as he moved through the house.

His two years in the Army had done nothing to take away the natural shyness he had. Sometimes Elvis would catch a girl pulling her hose up. He'd get a kick out of it.

Then he would point his forefinger at a spot between his eyes. He would cross his eyes and look at the end of his finger and say, "Elvis, if I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times. *Don't watch girls fixing their hose.*"

Word got around that Elvis loved to have people come up to the house. So they began hanging out around the front gate even more. Some began telling lies to the guards to get in. One favorite trick was to tell the guard that they were some of Elvis' relatives. The trick always backfired because the guards were usually Elvis' *real* relatives.

There were times when things would get out of hand.

Elvis hated stealing. He had a bad habit of taking off his jewelry and laying it on a table. When he would come back to pick it up, it might be missing. He would have a fit. Sometimes he would find stuffed animals and other little things missing that fans had given him.

Stealing was one thing he could not tolerate.

"You know, if people would just ask me for something, I'd give it to them," he said. "If they liked a ring I had, they could have it. But to come up here and steal it absolutely infuriates me. Why do people steal when they don't have to?"

Periodically, women who were visiting would put their purses in the dining room in a buffet drawer. Fans sometimes got in the drawers. Money would be taken out of them and sometimes an entire purse would be stolen.

"You know, somebody stole the eight ball out of the pool room tonight," Frances said, one night after Elvis had let a lot of fans come up from the gate. "I told Elvis and he said it wasn't the first time. He said there must be something about an eight ball because they've stolen a lot of them."

"What makes me sick," Patsy said, "is all the cigaret burns in Elvis' white carpets."

There was a huge orange ceramic ashtray in the living room. After a while, there were black burn spots on the table under it. People put down cigars

and cigarets on the edge of the ashtray and walked off and forgot them.

"Elvis won't ever say anything to them," Frances said. "Then he'll wonder why they act the way they do."

Elvis walked through the living room one night after everybody had gone. He stopped in the middle and looked around, counting cigaret burns. Ashtrays were missing. Pool balls were gone from downstairs.

"You know," he said, "it gets discouraging when you're proud of your home and try to keep it nice. It's a damn shame when somebody doesn't have enough respect for someone else's home that they have to be this careless."

"Why don't you say something to these people, Elvis?" Frances said.

He just shook his head and walked out.

He brought Anita back in with him. "Look at this mess," he said. "Did you ever see such a thing?"

He sat down on the couch. "I don't want a few people to ruin it for everyone," he said. "But I'm about ready to quit letting so many come up here."

One night, shortly after, we came driving back up the driveway very late. We had gone out driving and found a little ice cream parlor over by the airport. Elvis bought cones for everyone.

In the bright beams of his headlights he saw his parked Rolls Royce, the pride of his fleet of cars. Somebody had sneaked up there with a roll of toilet paper and rolled it.

"Why would anybody pull something like this?" he said.

He asked everybody about it when we got in the house. They swore they knew nothing about it.

"It wasn't any of us, Elvis," Red said. "We

were all with you eating ice cream."

"Somebody must have climbed over the fence and did it," Elvis said. Then he got a little sly look on his face. "If y'all hadn't been with me all evening, you'd be the first ones I'd suspect."

"Right, Sherlock," Frances said.

Less and less did Elvis open the front gates and let people come up and enjoy Graceland with him, something which he had always enjoyed doing.

Elvis had his barber come up one night to trim his hair. Heidi and Frances went upstairs to watch.

The barber let Heidi use the hair blower.

Frances, without anyone else seeing her, bent down and began picking up some of the hair that had been clipped off Elvis' locks.

She didn't say a word to anyone until much later.

"Don't ever tell Elvis I did such a thing," she said. "You know how much he wants us to keep our relationship on a personal basis. Please, don't tell him."

She agreed to divide the hair with us.

I gave her some of Elvis' cigar butts that had been lying around.

We began driving across the river bridge, late at night, to the Avon Theater in the town of West Memphis, Arkansas. The owner of the theater would set up some movies for Elvis and his gang to see. Sometimes people who lived over there would recognize Elvis driving down the street and they'd turn around and follow us. Elvis would let them into the theater and go up and sit in the balcony while we sat downstairs and watched the shows and ate popcorn.

Elvis was always inventing new games. He came up with one that the police got a kick out of

playing with us.

Elvis called it Bumper Tag. It would begin with Elvis being "it." He could handle his big limousine as smoothly as if it were a sports car. He would come up behind someone in another car and bump their rear bumper. The driver of that car would then be "it" and would chase someone else to bump their rear bumper.

The wild thing was that the police would see Elvis coming down the street playing Bumper Tag with the gang — and the police would join in.

Instead of bugging Elvis, they joined him and even made him an honorary deputy and gave him a badge.

Before Elvis closed down the front gate to almost everyone, a girl named Darlene Daugherty came along. She first came to Graceland during Elvis' last Christmas in Germany.

She couldn't meet Elvis, of course, but she did meet Uncle Travis who was working at the front gate. Uncle Travis was in charge of forwarding all the notes and cards that fans and friends left for Elvis at the front gate.

Darlene was only thirteen years old but she had the air of a girl who was much older. Uncle Travis liked her immediately and when she asked him to place some flowers on Gladys' grave for her, he was totally charmed. He sent the card on the flowers to Elvis in Germany. That had an effect on Elvis.

"Come back when he gets home and I'll see if I can get you in to see him," Uncle Travis told her.

"I prayed a lot," Darlene told me, out beside the pool one evening.

"When Elvis came home from Germany, he wanted to meet me. He knew I had sent flowers to his mother's grave.

"I met Bobby Smith down at the gate. Mother and I drove up to the house with Bobby. I couldn't believe it was happening.

"We parked in the back and just walked in the back door.

"There was Elvis standing there.

"Bobby introduced me in a very formal way.

"Elvis said, 'Where are you from?'

"I said, 'Oklahoma. Midwest City. I'm so happy you're back in this country.'

"Bobby said, 'Darlene, there are some other people here that I'd like you to meet.'

"I looked at Elvis and said, 'Well, goodbye.'

"He said, sort of angry like, 'Don't you ever say goodbye to me!'

"I smiled and said, 'Well, hello.'

"I went with Bobby into another room and met some other people. In a few minutes, Elvis came in. He sat down on the couch by me. I was talking to someone.

"Elvis kept looking at me and saying, 'Baby? Baby? Baby?'

"I wasn't paying any special attention. I was trying to seem real cool — as cool as a girl, thirteen, could be with a famous star of twenty-five.

"Someone tapped me on the shoulder. 'Elvis is talking to you.'

"I said, 'Who, me?'

"Elvis said, 'Yes, you.' "

Elvis was then convinced that Darlene was a female newspaper reporter who was trying to infiltrate his private life. When she was out of the room for a few minutes, Elvis told us he was sure Darlene was there for one reason only: to get a story.

"She's just too damn cool," he said. "I know she's a reporter. We've got to keep in mind that

she's in the house. Watch what you say. Watch what you do. She's looking for a story."

"Elvis was being extremely nice to me," Darlene said. "I wanted to be nice to him but I wanted him to stay at a little distance. I kept trying to look cool and charming but he kept being so flirty and attentive that it was all I could do to stay that way. He was being touching and loving. I think my unusual response was fascinating.

"Elvis asked me all about my home in Oklahoma. He asked what I was doing in Memphis. I told him we came to see a friend of my mother's. Mother was sitting across the room, just watching in amazement. There was no way I would tell him that we came to Memphis just to see him.

"All evening long, he kept coming around to me. I just didn't know how to respond to him. Then I noticed that everyone started treating me very cold and suspicious. It was a sudden thing, like a door had closed. They didn't talk as openly to me as they had when I first arrived.

"Elvis, however, remained warm and outgoing with me.

"Toward the end of the evening when I was getting ready to leave with mother — actually, it was nearly morning — I walked over to tell Elvis goodbye. He was standing at the back door. He kissed quite a few of the girls goodbye on their way out. But I just extended my hand to him and said, 'Elvis, I enjoyed myself thoroughly this evening.'

"He looked at me and really got angry. He said something privately to Bobby just before Bobby rode with us back down to the gate. At the gate, Bobby said, 'Elvis says he doesn't want to see you back up at the house. Ever. He doesn't even want to see you down here at the gate again.'

"Then Bobby walked back up the hill. I stood

there, crushed. Mother was in shock."

As soon as Darlene and her mother had gone, Elvis sent a friend of his to find out where Darlene was staying. He told the guy to take Darlene to breakfast and find out all he could about her. When the guy came back that morning he reported to Elvis that he was not able to get a thing on Darlene.

"I'll do my own investigation," Elvis said.

Darlene told me she was still crying in her hotel room when Bobby called her.

"He just said, 'Elvis wants to see you,' " Darlene recalled.

"I said I didn't think he did and Bobby said, 'He wants to see you tonight. Be sure to come to the gate.'

"That evening I stopped at the gate and joined the crowd of fans. Elvis drove in off the highway and hit the brakes hard when his headlights swept over me.

"He leaned out his window and said, 'Hi, baby. Will you be my date tonight?'

"I just nodded. I couldn't speak. I couldn't even believe it had happened."

After an evening with Darlene, Elvis finally decided that she was not a reporter. But she was not immediately accepted into the gang. As a matter of fact, I personally didn't like her. As time went on, we got to know her better and she became one of us. Ironically, Darlene and I became very close friends and later, when she moved to Memphis, we shared an apartment.

CHAPTER 9

Reading Elvis' Palm

Darlene liked to read people's palms. She could come up with the most fascinating things to tell them.

It always intrigued people when she would spread their palm open and look at it and go, *"Hmmmmmm."*

"Can you *really* read a person's palm?" I asked her just before we got dressed at the apartment we shared and went up to Graceland for the evening.

"Sure, I can," she said.

"I know you *can*," I said. "I mean, can you really tell anything by looking at a person's palm?"

"Yes," she said. "I read about how you do it. I tried it. It works for me. Maybe not for some people but it does for me."

"Okay," I said, holding out my palm. "What do you see?"

"I see we're going to be late unless we hurry," she said.

"Yeah, that's what I thought," I said.

She was brushing her dark brown hair at the mirror.

"I've been thinking about reading Elvis' palm," she said. "I want to see if he's going to get married. If he's going to have any kids."

"He wants four," I said. "Two boys and two girls."

She winked. "The palm tells all," she said. "The palm tells all."

"Are you serious?" I said.

"Do you think he'd like me to read his palm?" she said.

"Oh, Elvis would *love* it," I said. "Why don't you?"

"Maybe I will," she said. "Tonight."

We got up to Graceland a little before other people began arriving. Elvis was up in his room and he told us on the house phone to come on up.

"It's nothing special." he said. "I just want you up here. With me."

He was in his shower, behind the glass panel doors which had his initials on them. He was singing away in a kind of funny way.

"He knows we're out here listening," Darlene said.

"We're his audience tonight," I said.

We sat down on his enormous bed by the mirror and waited.

He came out in a pair of shorts.

He smiled. "I've been thinking I should go into opera. What do you think?"

"Only a fortune teller could tell you," Darlene said.

"Was it that bad?" Elvis said.

"No, it sounded that good," Darlene said. She held out her hand to take one of his. "Give me your palm. I'll see what the future holds for you."

Elvis got a red shirt and a pair of blue pants

from a hallway closet between the bedroom and his bath.

"Can you read palms, Darlene?" Elvis said, belting his pants and pulling on a shirt with a high collar. He turned to face us. "Do you like this shirt with these pants?" he said.

"It's great," I said.

Elvis was so pleased. "Thanks," he said. "I'm really crazy about this shirt."

"You're beautiful in it, Elvis," Darlene said. She knew how much he loved to get compliments.

Elvis came over to her, sat down beside her on the bed and stuck out his right palm.

"What do you see?" he said.

Darlene took it and spread it out in her lap. She looked at it a while and said, "*Hmmmmmm.*"

"What does that mean?" Elvis said.

She traced one of the lines in his palm, the line that slants down under the fingers.

"You love very deeply," she said. "You are very sensitive to criticism."

She gently pushed at one of the mounds on his palm. "You have a very strong heart. Great imagination and creative moods."

"Is he going to get married?" I said, laughing.

Elvis smiled. "No way," he said.

"Then how are you going to have four children?" I said.

Darlene looked up and said softly, "There will be only *one* child."

Elvis looked slightly troubled. "Only one?" he said.

Darlene put his hand down. "That's all I can see now. My vision . . . " She put the back of her hand up to her forehead in a stagey way. "My vision . . . is fading."

"Well, before it fades too far," Elvis said, "what

does my love life look like?"

She studied his palm again, more seriously than I had thought she would. She looked up at him with a faintly surprised look in her eyes.

"There is a divorce coming," she said, putting his hand down.

Elvis laughed. "You've given me the *bad* news. Now give me the *good* news."

He held his palm out to her again.

She looked at some lines at the bottom of his palm.

"You'll be seriously ill when you get a little older," she said.

He looked down at his palm to see what she was looking at that was betraying his future.

He asked softly, "Does that mean I'm going to die young?"

Darlene smiled and folded his fingers up into a fist. "Oh, I don't think it does. Now let me ask *you* one. Are you going to marry Anita Wood?"

Elvis jumped out of bed and went over to the big white chair in the corner. He sat down and began pulling on his shoes.

"I don't know why y'all are always so jealous of Anita," he said. "She's just as jealous of y'all."

"But she acts as though she has you all wrapped up," I said. "Frances says you're twisted around Anita's little finger."

Elvis frowned. "Nobody owns me," he said, in that kind of tough voice he sometimes used.

He got up and fixed his hair at the mirror. "Arlene, darlin', did you bring any gum tonight?" he said, carefully brushing his hair.

I had gum in my purse. Elvis was always chewing gum — or looking for a stick of it. My purse always carried gum and a hairbrush for him.

"I'm going down to the kitchen a minute,"

Darlene said. "Anybody want anything?" She shut the door behind her.

"That dress looks awful cute on you, sweetheart," Elvis said. "You ought to wear it more often."

"You know where I got it, don't you?" I said.

He shook his head.

"I didn't bring many things down from Chicago this time," I said. "You've seen them so many times that I borrowed this one tonight from Heidi. Sometimes I'm embarrassed that you've seen all my clothes so often."

"Arlene, that's about the last thing you need to apologize for with me," he said. "It's not clothes but the girl that's in them that catches my eye."

He handed my brush back and sat down by me.

"But I can see it's bothering you," he said. He put his arms around me. "I want you to go downtown tomorrow and buy yourself a bunch of new clothes. I'll pay for them."

"Thanks, Elvis, but I'd rather not," I said.

"I want you to," he said.

I shook my head. He looked a little puzzled, then he kissed me.

"It's there if you need it," he said. "If you ever need anything, all you have to do is ask me."

He got up and went over to the bedside table and picked out some rings. He slipped one on each hand and spread his fingers and looked at them.

Later in the evening, Darlene and I were sitting with Frances in the den. We were telling her about reading Elvis' palm.

"Too bad you don't have a crystal ball," Frances said, "so you could tell *who* he's going to marry some day."

"Good idea," Darlene said. "I'll work on one."

Elvis was sitting across the room, talking with Richard Davis, one of his guys. The music was playing. Elvis could not have heard what we were talking about. But he got up and came over and stood there, looking down at us.

"Can't you girls quit worrying about which one I'm going to marry?" he said. Then he went upstairs.

Richard got up to follow him and I called him over.

"How did Elvis know what we were talking about?" I said. "Could you hear us over there?"

Richard shook his head. "We couldn't hear you," he said. "It's weird how Elvis can do that. Sometimes it chills your spine. I could never figure out how he did it."

"You don't think it's a keen sense of hearing?" I said.

"It couldn't be," he said. "I really have no idea what it is. Sometimes I think he has this whole house wired for sound. Otherwise, how does he know the things he knows?"

He went off upstairs after Elvis.

We followed him. Elvis wasn't in the kitchen or the music room. We found him in his room.

"Come on in," Elvis said when we knocked.

He smiled when we came in. "You know, I've been thinking," he said. "How we'll all grow old together. Yeah, we'll all just stay together.

"I can see the time when we'll be growing old."

He bent his back and made his voice tremble with age. He pushed himself to his feet and shuffled about the room.

"I'll have to replace the stairs with ramps," he said.

It was a funny scene, the way he did it. But there was something serious in his voice.

"We'll all be running around Graceland in wheelchairs," he said. "I'll have the stairs replaced with ramps so we can get up and down real easy."

We sat down on the bed around him.

"I'm already getting plans to build another house out here," he said. "It's for all of us to use. The whole house will be on the ground level – no upstairs. There'll be five bedrooms. The whole thing will slowly revolve. The view out your window will be continually changing."

He laughed. "You'll have to be careful when you come out of your bedroom. You might step right off into the swimming pool."

He leaned back, enjoying thinking about the new house.

"The whole roof is going to be a skating rink," he said. "We can all go up there at night and skate under the stars. It'll be beautiful up there."

"Elvis, can I ask you something?" Heidi said.

"Sure. What?"

"Will you still make us take the 'white panty' test at the new house?" Heidi said.

Elvis laughed. "Heidi, I'll *always* want you girls to be my virgins in white panties," he said.

"Oh, no," Heidi said.

"Come here, darlin'," he said. "I think I'd better have a panty check right now. It sounds like it."

Heidi looked back at Frances. "After you," she said.

Frances shrugged and got up. Elvis peeled back the top of her pants to check the color of her panties. He saw that they were white. Frances was still a virgin.

I volunteered. Elvis checked my panties.

Then he looked at Heidi. Heidi held back a

moment, then allowed the check. Elvis pulled back the top of her pants. He straightened them back up and asked, "How come the black?"

"I was afraid you would call a panty check tonight," she said. "But I saw these cute and sexy little black things and I couldn't resist them."

Elvis shook his head. "You've got to wear white around here," he said. "I'll get Joe to take you home to change."

"Can I come back?" Heidi said.

"Yeah, but go change your panties," Elvis said.

Heidi got a pixie expression on her face. "Can I put the black ones back on later?"

Elvis laughed and whapped her backside. "Get out of here!"

She went downstairs and left with Joe in one of the cars.

It was known by all of us that Elvis "had a way of knowing things" that baffled us. Darlene got her first real taste of it a few days later.

It was late one afternoon and Darlene and I were getting ready to go out to Graceland for the evening. There was a knock on our door. A delivery boy was standing there with a box. It was for Darlene.

Darlene tossed it on the bed and hastily tore open the wrapping.

"Something from home," she said. "Maybe I should wait until later to open it. We need to get going. Oh, well."

She lifted off the lid of the box. Inside was a pretty little red negligee. Her mother had bought it on impulse and sent it to her.

She threw it back in the box and put the cover back on. "Come on," she said. "We've got to get a snack somewhere first."

While she was putting on her lipstick, I called

In the pool.

Alberta before she left for the day.

"Is Elvis in a good mood today?" I asked.

"Yes, Miss Arlene. He seemed like he was in a real good mood," Alberta said.

"Is Anita there?" I asked.

"No," Alberta said.

"Is anybody with him?" I asked.

"He's by himself, right now," she said.

"Thanks, Alberta," I said and hung up.

When we got out to the gate, the guard said we couldn't go up to the house immediately.

"Elvis sent down word for us to just wait a while," Earl Greenwood said. He had arrived ahead of us and was standing around with the mob of fans who were hoping to get a glimpse of Elvis.

We went over and sat in Earl's car and talked.

After a long time, Darlene said, "What are we going to do? Sit down here all evening until Elvis feels like telling us to come on up?"

"Be patient," I said.

We were listening to the George Klein Show on Earl's car radio.

"I have an idea," I said. I asked Earl to take us to a phone. I called George and asked him to play a special record. Then I came back and got in the car and listened to the radio.

George came on and said, "Now, here's 'Let Me In," and this one's dedicated to Deke Rivers from the gang."

We knew Elvis usually listened to George's radio program and that he would hear that dedication. Deke Rivers was the name of the movie roll Elvis played in *Loving You*.

"Hey, that's cute," Heidi said.

We kept listening. In a few minutes, George came back on the air. "Now, from Deke to all the

gang, here's 'Are You Lonesome Tonight?' " he said.

"That tease," I said as the record began.

I went back to the phone and called George to play a song for Vince Everett. That was Elvis' movie roll in *Jailhouse Rock*. The song was 'Open The Door, Richard.'

After that, George came back on with a dedication from YKW to the gang. YKW stood for You Know Who, another Elvis alias. The song was 'I'll See You In My Dreams.'

Finally, Elvis sent down word to the gate to let us in.

Darlene and I were sitting in the den a couple of hours later. Elvis came downstairs, grinning. He came over and sat down with us.

"That's a pretty red negligee you got, Darlene," he said.

Darlene and I looked at each other.

"Did you say anything to him about it?" Darlene asked.

"I haven't seen him until this moment," I said.

"How did you do that, Elvis?" Darlene asked.

"Darlene, there's nothing y'all do that I don't know about," Elvis said.

"Did you get them to let one of your guys into our apartment?" Darlene asked.

"No," he said. He jumped up and walked out and headed back upstairs.

We went up to the kitchen. People were gathered around Elvis. He was playing with a pair of giant dice. He was rolling them on the table.

Then be began rolling the dice for different parts of our bodies. One roll was for Darlene's legs. Another was for my brown eyes. Another for Heidi's cute chin. Frances' lips.

He wound up winning enough parts from all

the girls there to put together quite a woman.

Earl was still feeling a little cranky because we had to wait so long, down at the gate, before Elvis let us come up.

"Elvis, I'll tell you what," Earl said. "Let *me* shoot you for something."

"What'll we roll for?" Elvis said.

"Let's roll," Earl said, "and if I win, *you* have to go down to the front gate and wait around until *we're* damn good and ready to let *you* in."

Elvis laughed. He walked over to me with an impish look on his face. He bent down and cupped one hand over his ear and spoke into the other one like a telephone. He said, "Is Elvis awake? Is *he* in a good mood, tonight, Alberta? Is *anybody* up there with him, Alberta?"

I was blushing. Elvis loved it. Everybody but me was laughing. Elvis really had something on me. I felt like doing nothing but curling up in some corner and hiding.

Fortunately, Vernon came in and asked Elvis to come upstairs and talk to him about something.

Mack came over and sat down with me. "What a tease, that guy is," he said. "Did I tell you what he did at Chenault's Restaurant a couple of days ago?

"We went downtown to look at a truck that Elvis liked. On the way back, Elvis wanted to stop at Chenault's. We went in the side door, as usual, to his private dining room.

"So the waitress came in and we all ordered something. Elvis wanted breakfast and he ordered eggs.

"You know how he likes his eggs hard. Well, they brought them in sort of runny. Elvis sent them back and told them he wanted them cooked hard.

"Well . . . " Mack shook his head. "Well, here

comes the waitress with another plate of eggs. Elvis looked at them and jiggled the plate. Then he picked up the eggs and threw them at the wall. They splattered everywhere and just stuck there on the wall.

"Elvis handed the plate back to the waitress and said, 'Now that I've got your attention, bring me some eggs that *won't* stick on the wall, please, mam.'

"He said it real nice. When the waitress hurried out of the room we all stared up at the eggs on the wall and started laughing. It was just Elvis in his playful mood. Nobody else could get away with it. We might have done the same thing if we could have."

CHAPTER 10

The Battling Banties

Elvis took his sense of humor everywhere — on stage, to press conferences, to bed, even to the hospital as it actually happened one Sunday afternoon.

Heidi and I arrived at Graceland just after lunch, in our blue jeans. Elvis wanted us to go along with him while he played football. It was touch football — no tackling — still, it got pretty rough at times. The guys blocked each other pretty hard.

Standing on the sidelines watching, we heard a lot of grunts and gasps. Guys would slowly get to their feet after a play.

Elvis could throw long, high passes. There was nothing the other team loved to do more than hit a guy who was stretching up to catch one of Elvis' passes.

They were going at it. The weather was beautiful. The girls and some of the neighborhood youngsters stood on the sidelines, watching.

Elvis was quarterback for his team. His cousin, Wayne Mann, was his fullback.

"There's only one guy on the field I can't outrun," Wayne liked to say. "And that's Elvis. He's *really* fast."

On one play — it turned out to be the last play of the game — Elvis broke out of the backfield in a spinning drive. For a moment, it looked as if he would get away. Then he hit a slippery dust patch on the field and his foot skidded out from under him and he hit the ground.

When Elvis got up and trotted back to the huddle, someone looked down at his hand and said, "Elvis, what's wrong with your finger?"

Elvis held his right hand up and looked at it. The little finger flopped down flat against the back of his hand. It looked hinged in the wrong direction.

"Elvis, you broke your finger," Wayne said.

Elvis straightened the finger up and said, "It'll be all right."

He started to join the huddle to call the next play.

The finger flopped over backward.

"It's *broke*, Elvis," Wayne said.

Everybody on the field trotted over and stood looking at the peculiar looking little finger.

"You can't play with that," one of the guys said.

Elvis frowned. "Well, who's got a car?" he said.

"I've got mother's station wagon," Heidi said.

We all jumped in — me and Heidi and Elvis and Anita Wood.

"We'll go down to the emergency room at Baptist Hospital," Elvis said, looking calmly at the finger and making it waggle back and forth.

Heidi hit the gas pedal and we tore off toward the hospital.

Little finger in splint after the game.

Elvis looked over at the speedometer with wide eyes.

"Slow down," he said. "It's not hurting me."

Heidi kept flying.

"Hon, how long have you been driving a car?" Elvis said.

"Not very long," Heidi said, gripping the wheel.

"Heidi, you don't have to break any records," Elvis said. "It's not like I was dying or anything."

Heidi was pale with anxiety. She wasn't about to slow down. She squinted in concentration and wove in and out of traffic.

Driving down Union Avenue, approaching the hospital, Heidi shot up beside a car with three girls in it.

Elvis looked over at the girls. When they looked around and saw it was Elvis, he smiled and held up his hand with the dangling little finger. He moved his hand to make the finger flop back and forth.

"I *boke* it," he told them. "I *boke* my widdle finger."

Heidi shot on around their car.

"Elvis, they will think you're crazy," I said.

"They'll *know* it," Heidi said, white faced still, as she turned in to the hospital complex.

We parked on a side street and hurried in the entrance to the hospital's emergency room. When the people in the white dresses and shoes and caps saw that it was Elvis, their faces suddenly came alive. They started scurrying about and making inside phone calls and whispering into the mouthpieces.

We all thought they would set Elvis' finger and let him go.

"Mr. Presley," said a nurse, "the office feels

you should check into one of our rooms as soon as we have finished with the x-ray. So, if you will follow me, please."

"What about my friends?" Elvis said.

"I'll tell them where you are as soon as you have checked into your room," she said.

Elvis looked a bit puzzled. "You think this is enough for me to stay overnight?" he said.

The nurse tilted her head. "You can't be *too* careful, you know," she said.

Elvis shrugged and went with the nurse toward the x-ray laboratory. We found seats in the waiting room.

After a while, the nurse hurried back.

"You may see Mr. Presley now," she said.

Heidi asked, "Is he going to be all right?"

"We feel Mr. Presley should remain overnight," the nurse said in a very professional manner.

"With only a broken little finger?" Heidi said.

"We must be careful," she said. "Especially with someone as prominent as Mr. Presley." She told us Elvis' room number.

We knocked on the door and slowly pushed it open.

"Come in," Elvis said.

He was sitting on the side of the bed, his finger in a splint. Crisscrossed tape secured the splint to his hand.

"Can you believe this?" he said, looking at his finger. "They say I have to stay overnight with this thing."

Anita and Heidi sat on the bed. Somebody took pictures of them.

A nurse came in and handed Elvis a little bottle. She quietly and modestly asked him to provide the hospital with a specimen of his urine.

When she left Elvis shook his head. "These

people," he said. He held the bottle up and turned it between his fingers.

"You know what we ought to do with this?" he said. "Let's all go in and pee in this jar and give it to them. It'll blow their minds."

He walked over to the window and looked at the horizon.

"This will keep you off the football field a while," Heidi said.

He turned and sat down on the window ledge.

"I'll be back playing in a couple of days," he said.

It reminded me of what his cousin, Wayne, had said, just before the game started:

"I never saw a man with as much energy as Elvis. He has to work off some of that energy — some of that anxiety. He has more energy than any two men I know."

Elvis couldn't be at home at Graceland that night. We all decided to meet at Mack's house. Often, when Elvis was out of town or engaged with Colonel Parker on business, we would go to Mack's house.

Elvis' friends began to drop in that night in much the same way they would at Graceland if Elvis were there. Mack was always smiling and happy to see everyone. You always felt at home there.

One night, later on, Elvis decided not to have company. It was a rare thing. So Mack said, "Well, let's all go over to my house and party."

That evening, one of the big local radio personalities came by to join us. He got a little noisy. Mack had just waxed all those gorgeous hardwood floors in his house and this guy was sitting backwards in his chair and scooting around on the floors. It made a lot of scratch marks.

Mack finally asked the guy to leave.

Someone talked to Elvis on the phone that night and mentioned that all of us had gone down to Mack's house and had a great time. The next night, when we got to Graceland, Elvis had already heard all about our big party at Mack's house. It bothered him.

"I guess y'all had a good time last night," Elvis said.

We all nodded silently. Elvis looked at us, a little hurt.

"I guess you had a *real* nice time," he said.

Mack saw that Elvis was upset. He didn't know why.

"Yeah," Mack said, "they all seemed to enjoy themselves."

Elvis shook his head. "How come nobody bothered to invite me?"

Mack looked a little alarmed. "We all knew you wanted to be by yourself, Elvis," he said. "And besides, I can't imagine you wanting to go to a party at my house."

"I just don't like y'all ignoring me," Elvis said. He walked out of the room.

Mack looked at me with a blank face.

"Can you imagine me inviting Elvis Presley to my house for a party?" he said. "A millionaire who lives like *he* does?"

"You know, Mack, it's always Elvis doing for us," I said. "It's always his house. On the rare occasions we do something else, we never really think to invite him along. I can see why he feels we leave him out. I don't think it ever dawned on any of us before."

Feeling very much at home at Graceland had its comic problems sometimes.

One night, Elvis walked through the living

room smoking one of his favorite cigars.

"Does that cigar smell *sweet*," said Dottie Ayers.

"There's a whole open box of cigars lying over there by the door to the music room," Frances said.

"You think I'd go over there and light one up, right in front of Elvis?" Dottie said. "No, thanks, Frances."

Vernon heard her. He went out in the hallway and got us a couple of cigars from the open box. "Here, have a cigar," he said with a big smile.

Dottie said, "I will if you will, Arlene," she said.

So I took one and we went out into the hallway, just to the side of the stairs at the front of the house.

Vernon stood there with his hands in his pockets, watching us and laughing.

"Go ahead and smoke 'em," he said.

I hesitated. "Maybe we shouldn't, Dottie," I said.

"Try it," Vernon said gently. "Nobody is around. Elvis is down in the den with everybody."

He held up the flame of his lighter.

Dottie was giggling and puffing on the cigar. Smoke started billowing up around the stairs.

Vernon laughed and strolled out. We should have been suspicious of him then but we weren't. Dottie took a big puff and blew it out.

We heard Elvis coming up the stairs, singing.

There was no place to hide. Dottie sat down in the chair by the long table with the Bible on it. I was left standing.

Dottie shut her mouth on another puff of smoke and tried not to breathe again. She put the cigar down between her legs and closed her legs. You couldn't see the cigar.

Elvis walked up and looked at us without any apparent suspicion. "What are y'all up to?" he said.

"Nothing, Elvis," I said. "We're just talking."

"Right," he said. He looked back and forth at us. "What are you talking about?"

I shrugged and looked down at Dottie in horror. Smoke had begun coming up around her crossed legs.

Dottie sort of smiled. Smoke seeped out of her mouth.

Elvis reached down and grabbed her arms. He pulled them out from between her legs. She was still holding the cigar.

"Go ahead and smoke that thing, Dottie," he said, smiling. "Don't let me bother you any."

He walked on out of the hallway, still smiling.

He never said anything to other girls who came up to Graceland about smoking. But he constantly told us he didn't want us to smoke — *ever*.

"It's not becoming to a woman," he said.

Dottie got up. "You know who sent Elvis upstairs to check on us, don't you?" she said.

I nodded. "It was Vernon. I'm going to kill him."

We got rid of the cigar in the kitchen. We sprayed our mouths to kill the smell of cigar smoke and went back down to the den.

There wasn't a sad face in the den. Elvis never liked those "great stone faces" around him. He wanted only fun people around.

Gene Smith was doing some of his comic voices. He could do the goofiest things with his face. Elvis tried his best to copy Gene.

Elvis could walk into any room where Gene was and if he was depressed, Gene was the one person who could change his mood instantly.

Gene had a way of sticking his neck far out and doing a squeaky little voice that would make the entire house go hysterical.

With everyone watching Gene, Elvis slipped out of the den. When he came back in, he created a panic. He came loping through the door with hands dangling low and wearing a gorilla mask. He was making the strange, huffing noise of a gorilla.

All the girls screamed and jumped up and tried to get away from him. Elvis chased them around the room and across to the pool room and around the pool table. They scattered like a herd of frightened geese. Some ran up the stairs. Elvis beat his chest and went bounding up the steps after them.

He came loping back down the stairs and into the den. He grabbed me and lifted me up.

He was tickling me and I was screaming for help. He dropped me on a couch and loped out of the room and up the stairs. We heard screams coming from the kitchen area.

Elvis wore his gorilla mask for the rest of the evening.

Finally, some of the girls got him down in the living room and got the mask off him. They began taking pieces of Elvis and massaging him. One took one arm. One took the other. One took a leg. Everybody got a piece of Elvis to massage.

He was ticklish but he just gave up and stretched out on the floor. "What a way to die," he said.

I had my shoes off. He was trying to reach the bottoms of my feet with his fingers. He loved to tickle my feet. He knew it drove me crazy — the same effect tickling had on him.

"Elvis, I'd advise you not to start tickling any-

body," I said. "You're in no position to start something like that."

"Oh, what a way to go," he laughed.

We all tried to keep Elvis feeling good. When he was in a sad mood, his feelings seemed to spread among us.

You learned to avoid certain little things that could spoil his good mood as quickly as a flash of lightning.

One thing to avoid was messing up his hair after he got it brushed just the way he wanted it. You could be talking privately to him upstairs in his room and get away with it — but mussing his hair in public was a no-no.

One of the girls forgot and ran her fingers through his hair in the music room. He got up and stalked out with a look of February snow clouds on his face.

Vernon found ways to make Elvis laugh. Once he turned two banty roosters into a good laugh for Elvis and everyone else on the hill.

Earl's father had bought the two little roosters. One was dark and the other one light. He put them out in their back yard and thought they would get along very well together.

The Greenwoods lived in a nice, quiet neighborhood on Briarwood. When the two roosters began crowing every morning, between four and five o'clock, the neighbors suffered early morning shock. They complained. The chickens had to go.

"I don't know what to do with them," Earl said one day, while we were driving around. Elvis was in Hollywood making a movie and things were going slowly for everyone.

We drove around a while longer and I thought about calling Vernon and asking him if he would like to adopt two banty roosters. He said he'd take

Carrying scripts home to study.

them and for us to bring them on out.

We headed for Graceland. Earl tried to drive and hold the tops of the rooster crates down at the same time. It became a real struggle. I got scared at all the commotion the roosters were creating. I told Earl to stop the car.

"Let me drive and you control those roosters," I said. "We're going to wreck if you don't."

Vernon immediately took the roosters out back and let them loose and we all sat down in the kitchen to have some coffee.

Vernon started laughing. He was watching the two roosters through the window.

"Elvis is going to get a big kick out of these two," he said. "I'm going to name the light one Arlene and the other one Earl."

He winked at us. "Just wait until Elvis calls home tonight."

Sure enough, Elvis called in the early evening to see what was going on at home. Earl and I were still there when Vernon took the call.

"Elvis," Vernon began, a serious look on his face. "I don't know how to handle it."

"What's the problem, daddy?" Elvis said.

"It's Earl and Arlene," Vernon said. "They're chasing each other all over the back yard."

"Earl and Arlene?" Elvis echoed in disbelief.

"That's right, son," Vernon said. "Earl and Arlene. They really go at each other, sometimes."

"You mean Earl and Arlene are out in the back-yard, fighting?" Elvis said.

"They're going at it right now," Vernon said. "I tell you, I don't know exactly how to break them up or how to keep them apart."

Elvis said, "Daddy, I don't want to hear about anybody fighting back there. Find out what their problem is. Maybe you can mediate the situation.

Do something and then call me back on it."

Vernon broke out into laughter. He told Elvis about the two banty roosters from the Greenwoods that he had adopted that day.

"I call the dark one 'Earl,' " Vernon said. "The light one I call 'Arlene.' "

After Elvis got back from Hollywood, he would sometimes go to the back door and look outside and yell, "Hey, Arlene! Fly over here to me darlin'."

One night, in the kitchen, Patsy nudged me and pointed to the myna bird cage. It was empty.

"Did you hear what happened?" she said.

I shook my head.

"Remember that shallow dish it drank out of?" she said. "Somebody took it out. They put in a coffee can with water in the bottom. The bird went in, head first, to get a drink. It couldn't get back out — and drowned."

The myna bird's noisy chatter had apparently made someone very angry.

The kitchen was absolutely packed that night. Some people were let up from the gate. Jean and Pam Drew were down from Chicago. It was packed to the walls.

The door to the dining room was shut. Suddenly it opened. Elvis looked out and hollered at me, "Arlene, come here!"

He went back into the dining room. Charlie Hodge was in there with him.

I tried to get up and out but it was so crowded I was having trouble.

Elvis got really impatient. He came to the door and yelled, "Arlene, I said, Come here!"

He shut the door.

I still was having trouble getting across the

room. Elvis came back to the dining room door and yelled, "Damn it, Arlene, I said, Come here!"

He shut the door.

When I managed to get into the dining room he pulled out a chair for me and then he sat down facing me at the head of the table. Charlie sat directly across from me.

I looked at Charlie and he was motioning me, with a finger over his lips, to remain silent.

"Arlene, I've always wanted you to feel like Graceland was your home," Elvis said, "but I never dreamed you'd do a thing like this."

I just stared.

"I never thought you'd tell someone that their kids were not welcome in my house," Elvis pressed on, angrily.

I started to ask him what on earth he was talking about. He cut me off.

"How could you tell Venus Milloway that she couldn't bring her children up here at night, that they are not welcome?" he said.

He really was *hot*. He didn't bother to ask me if I had said such a thing. He was just yelling accusations.

Venus ran a cafe on McLemore Street which Vernon liked to visit from time to time.

Elvis kept yelling. "How could you, of all people?"

I was nearly in tears.

Charlie kept motioning me to remain silent. I had a big lump in my throat and my chin was quivering. I knew that tears were going to come down any second. I didn't want Elvis to see it.

I pushed my chair back and jumped up and ran into the kitchen, trying to make my way through the crowd.

Elvis yelled for me to come back. I kept running.

I heard him coming after me. "You better get back here, Arlene," he said. "I mean it."

I made it to the back door, Elvis not far behind me. I ran outside in the dark behind the house. Elvis called my name again. I didn't answer him. I just kept running, crying hysterically.

I heard someone calling my name but it wasn't Elvis. I looked back and it was Charlie Hodge running after me. He caught up to me.

"Let's go sit in the limousine and talk, Arlene," Charlie said. "Everything's going to be all right.

"You know how Elvis is. He's just mad right now."

"But, Charlie, he wouldn't even let me talk," I said. "I don't even know anything about this. I never told Venus that her kids weren't welcome. But he won't give me the courtesy of denying it."

Charlie nodded and pulled me by the arm toward the limousine. We sat down inside.

"He'll be all right when he finds out the full story," Charlie said. "It'll be all right."

"No, it won't," I sobbed. "He *hates* me."

"It'll all come to light," Charlie said. "He'll find out the truth. Come on. Blow your nose and let's go back in the house."

I told him I couldn't face Elvis and all those people. He had embarrassed me so much.

Charlie had one of the guys drive me home.

As Charlie said, Elvis did find out who was at fault — and he made it up to me.

CHAPTER 11

Surprise in Cashmere

When Elvis got into his boating phase he bought several speedboats. One was never enough. He had all kinds of boats. At one time he even owned the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal yacht, The Potomac, which Elvis soon gave to charity.

Piloting his speedboats was one way he could safely leave Graceland during the daylight hours. He could still maintain his privacy out on the water.

He began buying different kinds of yachting caps. Blues and whites. Different colors. Different styles. He looked sensational in all of them, of course.

When he came back from Hollywood after making the movie, *Kid Gallahad,* he was wearing a yachting cap.

He wore it the next time we saw him — and the next time — and the next. In fact, we never saw him without that same cap.

The first night he was back, he greeted us all, wearing the cap. It stayed on his head all night. We

never saw him take it off.

Heidi and Frances and I were up in his room later. He wanted to tell us everything that had happened to him in California.

We kept looking up at his yachting cap. He'd tug on the bill and keep right on talking.

He mentioned, at one point, that studio makeup artists had changed the color of his hair a little for the movie. So we thought he must be embarrassed about the hair dye.

"Elvis, why don't you take your cap off?" Heidi said, after a long while.

He patted her. "Naw, I think I'll keep it on."

We kept talking. We kept wondering.

We sneaked out quietly, just as the dawn slowly brightened the meadow behind the house. Elvis had fallen asleep with that yachting cap pulled down over his eyes. No one dared take off the cap to steal a peek.

We were driving around with Earl one afternoon, waiting for Elvis to wake up. Earl said, almost to himself, *"Elvis is losing his hair! Why else would he refuse to take off his hat?"*

That evening, Frances suddenly reached up to take off Elvis' cap and he pushed her hand back.

"No, no," he said. "I want it on."

Earl raised his eyebrows and looked at us as if to say, *"You see?"*

We got together in the little alcove by the front stairs to discuss it while Elvis was busy on a long distance call.

"Can't one of you girls find out?" Earl said.

I decided to approach Elvis. He was alone upstairs so I would be allowed to talk to him about anything at all.

"Elvis, are you really losing your hair?" I said.

"What?" he said.

"Everybody thinks you're going bald," I said.

"Oh, my God! You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding," I said. "Everybody has the idea now, that you're getting bald and you don't want us to know about it. So you wear that cap all the time to cover it up."

Elvis doubled up laughing. "Y'all are crazy. Who came up with that one?"

"I guess it was Earl's idea," I said.

"That sounds like one of Earl's bald brained ideas," Elvis said.

"You're not losing your hair?" I said.

"Lord, no," he said. "This hat is a gift from the studio. I'm crazy about it. Do you like it?"

"It's cute on you," I said.

"And the studio did something to my hair that I didn't really like very much," he said. "I'm letting it grow out."

He smiled, knowing I would like a peek at his hair.

"In a couple of days," he said. "A couple of more days."

"I'll be so glad when you get that thing off of you," I said, making a grab for it.

Elvis ducked. "Don't tell the others why I'm keeping it on," he said. "I want to keep them wondering."

He walked around the house, the next couple of days, with the hat on at a cocky little angle, a faint smile on his lips.

Then he came walking in the living room one evening. He did not have on that cap. He was bare headed. He looked at each of us, then slowly turned a full circle and walked back out.

He had a full head of hair.

The first thing he wanted to do after taking off

the cap was to walk outside and go down to the gate and talk to fans.

He wanted us to go with him. When we got down near the gate and heard the voices of the fans when they discovered Elvis coming toward them out of the dark, we moved off to the side. We let the fans have Elvis to themselves. Still, some of them came over to talk to us.

"Who's Elvis dating now?" "Is he going to get married?" "Is he going out tonight?" "How long will he be here?" "What's he like at home?"

A girl asked Frances, "What are you to Elvis? His family?"

Frances said, "No, we're part of Elvis' gang."

"Do you date Elvis?" the girl said.

"Yes, but so do a few others," Frances said.

Another girl asked, "Can people sometimes go up there?"

"Sometimes," Frances said.

A man asked, "How many cars does he have now?"

"I think it's eleven," Frances said. She looked at me. "Or is it twelve now?"

"It's twelve," I said.

"Is the Rolls Royce his favorite?" the man asked.

"No," Frances said, "it's the 1957 Cadillac."

"The old Cadillac?" the man said.

"Yeah," Frances said. "He had an awful lot of fun in that car. He hates to give it up."

We heard the fire truck coming. The city had built a station close to Graceland. Firemen were proud they could get to Elvis' door in less than a minute.

We stood back and watched the engine swing in, thundering loud, bells ringing. You could feel the rumble in the pavement under your feet.

Fans looked up at the house as Elvis turned.

"Are we on fire?" Elvis said.

The gate guard came outside to report. "Nothing, boss. It's somebody turning in another false alarm."

"That's a heck of a bad joke to play," Elvis said.

A fan said, "Somebody sends firemen up there on a wild goose chase?"

"They've done it a lot, lately," Elvis said.

In a few minutes, we saw firemen come back out of the house and get on their truck. They drove down the hill. When they got near the gate, Elvis walked over to the truck and stood there talking with the firemen a minute.

Fans asked more questions.

"He gives away a lot of jewelry, doesn't he?" one asked.

"Yes, he does," I said. "He's a very generous person."

A girl asked me, "What is Elvis going to do tonight?"

"He's got a private party going," I said.

The girl nodded but she didn't walk away. She said she wasn't going to leave, in case Elvis might change his mind and call down to the gate and tell the guards to let everybody in.

Elvis left the fire truck and motioned to us. We walked back up to the house. Fans were calling goodbye to Elvis. He waved.

When we walked in the front door Elvis yelled for Sonny West. When Sonny came out of the rear of the house, Elvis said, "Sonny, how about a karate workout?"

The powerful bodyguard smiled. "Sure, boss. Let's go."

They both ran upstairs to change into karate outfits.

Many evenings, since Elvis had come home from Germany, there were karate demonstrations in the big front hallway.

We all sat on the stairs that led up to Elvis' room.

Elvis and Sonny came back downstairs and Elvis began going through some karate exercises.

His right hand was swollen from breaking wooden boards and bricks.

"Colonel Parker would love this," teased Heidi.

Elvis' hand normally was slender but now it was so badly swollen that it was showing up in Elvis' movies. Colonel Parker was alarmed by the hand. It was clearly visible.

But Elvis was crazy about karate. Nothing would be able to take him away from it until he had enough.

Elvis was flying through the air at Sonny in the most beautiful karate move I had ever seen. It may have been a deadly force but to me it was all style and grace.

Then Elvis did something designed to make our mouths drop open a mile.

He looked up at the huge chandelier that hung high over the entry. With a light leap, he lofted up into the air and touched the chandelier with a toe — and dropped back lightly to the floor.

We knew that people who were not there would not believe it. It was an incredible performance — and looked so easy. A ballet star would have been thrilled to have executed it.

Elvis was double jointed and could make his whole body quiver from head to toe. He slowly did a split on the floor then got up and bent over backward until he was touching the floor with his hands. Then he began doing somersaults, smooth

as a rolling ball, across the living room and back again.

He moved with such graceful authority.

The next day, Earl and I were out driving. Earl didn't like to drive so I was at the wheel. I drove down along the river in front of Memphis. There's a little point on Riverside Drive where you can park right by the river and enjoy the scene.

Sometimes Elvis would be out on the river and when he sent his speedboat scooting past that point, Elvis would look over to see who was there watching.

If he saw me he would swing over and pick me up for a little ride upriver.

Sometimes he let me drive the boat. I loved that.

I thought Elvis was going to get a good sunburn some day on the river. But he always had on one of his caps and long pants and shirt.

Earl and I didn't see Elvis anywhere along the waterfront. We drove south, trying to find him further down the river.

We spotted him skimming along near the lake, leaving a white wake. Elvis spotted Earl's car and my waving hand. He swung in and picked us up and took us upriver a few miles to some sandbars.

He drove the boat high up onto the beach. We all got out and walked in the hot sand. I took off my shoes and went barefoot. It felt wonderful.

When we got back to the pickup point, Elvis let us out by Earl's car and said, "Y'all come on back to Graceland."

He sped off toward his dock.

I felt pretty bedraggled from the boat ride by the time we drove out to Graceland. My hair was a mess. We were in the kitchen and Alberta was pouring us a cup of coffee.

Elvis went upstairs to change clothes. In the meantime, I got out my mirror and did a repair job.

When Elvis came back down he was wearing a clean pair of pants and a gorgeous cashmere sweater. It was sleeveless, off white in color and it looked just beautiful on him. It had a vee neck and he wore it without a shirt.

He looked gorgeous in anything.

He sat down with us and there was a funny sort of mischievous smile on his face.

"That sweater is just beautiful on you," I said.

"Thanks," he said. "I like it, too."

He started telling Earl about the first time he had met me in Chicago. At the press conference.

"She had a fan club for me," he said.

"That was *before* I knew you," I said.

He winced. "Burnt!" he said.

"Oh, God, you know I didn't mean it that way," I said.

He looked down at his sweater. "I've had this sweater up in the attic for a long time," he said. "I just happened to go up there, a few minutes ago, looking for something else, and I found it.

"There's tons of things up there that fans have given me. I open all the stuff they send, as soon as I get it. I never just throw anything away.

"Patsy calls me a pack rat.

"I happened to notice this one box in that whole pile up there. I found this sweater in it."

He pulled a slip of paper out of his pocket.

"It had this note in it," he said, and handed the paper to me.

All of a sudden it began to dawn on me. I recognized the way the note was folded. I recognized the writing as my own.

"My God," I said, "that's the first thing I ever

gave you. It's the sweater I left with your mother, that time. And you're just now taking it out of the box? Oh, Elvis.

"I thought it had been thrown away long ago. Do you mean to say you've let it stay up there all this time, collecting cobwebs, and didn't even know it was there?"

Elvis laughed and ducked when I pretended to throw something at him.

The night Elvis, in karate clothes, had kicked the chandelier in the hallway, one of the guys asked him, "What happens when a karate man stands up against a good wrestler?"

"He whips his tail," Elvis said.

You could see the sparks fly in his eyes.

Now, he sat across the kitchen table from me and Earl, with that same little spark flashing in his eyes.

"Treacherous Phillips is coming out tonight," he said. I'm taking him on. I want you guys here to watch."

Elvis gently rubbed his open palm across the surface of the cashmere sweater. "I'll handle him without ever messing up my clothes," he said. He laughed. "I won't even need to borrow your hair brush, darlin'."

Treacherous Phillips drove up to the house that night with two other wrestlers. They were huge guys with just a little fat and a lot of hair bleach.

Their beefy hands looked like they could drive railroad spikes without the help of hammers.

Elvis wasn't around. He was getting a haircut. The wrestlers sat in the kitchen and talked to us and waited.

They joked about the wrestling profession and told little inside stories about how they fooled people with grunts and groans.

"There's a regular training school for wrestlers to learn all that stuff," one of them said.

"A school?" someone said. "Where is it?"

"Over near Bolivar, Tennessee," he said.

Patsy laughed. "Bolivar is where the insane asylum is," she said.

The wrestler shrugged. "Well, it gets a little crazy in the ring."

In a while, Sonny and Elvis came downstairs in their karate clothes.

We all moved into the front hallways and took seats on the stairs.

Elvis and Sonny started showing the wrestlers some of the fundamentals of the karate art.

"Looks good," Treacherous Phillips said.

"It's a lot tougher than it looks," said Elvis.

Treacherous Phillips nodded. "Don't you think a karate man would just have a hell of a tough way to go if somebody threw him in the ring with wrestlers like us? Now, tell the truth, Elvis. Tell the truth."

Elvis grinned. "A good karate man would kill you," he said.

"Not once I got a good hold on him," said Treacherous Phillips.

"You couldn't *keep* a hold on a really good karate man," Elvis said. "He'd break it. Like that."

The wrestlers looked doubtful.

"I'll bet you a thousand bucks you wouldn't break a lock if one of us got it on you," one of them said.

Elvis tightened the belt on his karate robe and said, "Get your best hold on me. Let's see what happens."

"You sure?" the wrestler said.

"Get your best hold," Elvis repeated.

"I don't want to hurt you," the wrestler said.

"You won't," Elvis said.

The wrestler ran his thick fingers through his hair and suddenly grabbed Elvis in a bear hug that looked like it would take the breath out of you.

Elvis bent over and began running and dragging the wrestler behind him. He ran across the hall, spun around and slammed the wrestler against a bannister.

There was a grunt and a groan.

The wrestler's hold on Elvis melted. Elvis spun free.

The wrestler shook his head as if to clear out the cobwebs.

Elvis took his hand and pulled him to his feet. Then he looked at the others. "Want to try it?" he said.

They shook their heads.

When the wrestlers left, Elvis and Sonny went upstairs to change clothes. The rest of us headed downstairs to the den.

Frances went through a stack of records and loaded the player. Elvis always wanted the top songs to be playing at Graceland all the time. The guys brought in a couple of new girls.

When he came downstairs he looked cool and refreshed — and pleased. He had on a red puffed sleeved shirt and white pants.

Elvis was on a kick of using the phrase "Oh, really?" No matter what would be said to him, he would come back with that phrase. It was a little game he played on people.

One of the new girls smiled brightly when Elvis picked up a cue stick and began to chalk it.

"Whoever buys your clothes has real good taste," she said.

"Oh, really?" Elvis said.

"*Oh, no,*" I said to myself. "*Here we go again.*"

The girl said, "I wanted to tell you I have enjoyed your movies so much."

"Oh, really?" Elvis said.

"Yes," the girl said as Elvis lined up a shot to break the pool balls. "You know, you're even better looking in person, though."

"Oh, really?" Elvis said and he broke the balls.

"I never thought I'd get to come up here," she said.

The girl was beginning to look puzzled. I got up and went over to break it up before the poor girl decided that Elvis was just crazy.

"Your house is absolutely beautiful," she said.

"Oh, really?" he said.

"Elvis, do you want to play?" I said, walking up.

He straightened up with a big smile. He poked me with the chalked end of his cue stick. It left a little round blue mark on my dress.

"Yeah, let's play," he said.

He liked to tickle me in my ribs with his cue stick. He poked me again with it.

"Elvis, stop!" I yelled. I reached up over my head to take a cue stick off the wall. He poked me again under the armpit. I began to laugh and back away from him.

He chased me out of the room, poking me with that cue stick and laughing until I turned and fled up the stairs.

"Let's play, Honey," he yelled after me.

I had those funny little blue chalk marks all over my dress when I got upstairs and looked at myself in one of the wall mirrors.

After a while I went back downstairs to the poolroom. I walked in and said, "Elvis, look at what you did to my dress. You ruined it."

He looked at me quite seriously. "Oh, really?"

"Stop saying that!" I yelled.

"Oh, really?" he said.

"I'm leaving," I said.

"Oh, really?" he said.

I turned to leave and he came after me. He grabbed me around the waist and spun me around and bit me on the ear.

"Don't leave me now, Arlene," he teased. "You're bringing me good luck. Just stand over there behind me and watch me shoot the rest of this game."

He bent down and whispered in my ear. "Then I'll let you do something for me."

"What, Elvis?" I whispered back.

He whispered, "I'll let you fix me a peanut butter and banana sandwich."

CHAPTER 12

Men in White Sox

Too soon, Elvis had to leave to go back to California to make another movie.

Elvis was depressed at the idea of being away from home and his friends and family for so long a time.

The Saturday night before he left, he asked the girls to come upstairs after all the other guests had gone home.

He was reading a stack of newspapers when we came in. He tried to keep up with everything. He even bought three television sets so he could watch all the good football games on the weekends and not miss any of them.

He finished reading one of the papers and put it down, shaking his head.

"I really don't know where these writers get the stuff they say about me," he said.

He patted the top of the bed, telling us to come sit by him.

He settled back against some pillows.

"I'll be leaving in a few days," he said. I'll worry about every one of you while I'm gone.

"The main thing is, I don't want you to mess yourself up with some guy. Y'all mean everything to me. I don't want something bad happening while I'm in California. I worry so much about that.

"I don't expect you to wait around for me for three months, while I have to be gone. And not have a date all that time.

"But I don't want anybody taking advantage of the situation. Be careful of who you are with. The best thing would be to stay together and watch out for each other."

I wanted to reassure him. I said we'd spend a lot of time out on the patio, getting a suntan and we'd drop in on Mack a lot.

Elvis nodded approval. "That's fine," he said. "I'd feel real good about you being over there. Mack will look after you.

"Just remember, if anyone gives you any trouble, just remind them that I'll be coming back."

Elvis felt jealous about us, the same as we felt jealous about him.

One evening, when he and I were alone, we were discussing the whole matter of dating. He said that he really would prefer that we wouldn't date anybody.

"I know I don't have the right to keep you from dating while I'm away but I still don't like it," he said.

It really could get lonesome for us when Elvis left to go to Hollywood for a while. We stuck together, most of the time, as he asked us to. We counted the days until he came home again.

We called him at his home on Bellagio Drive as often as we could afford to.

When we heard that Elvis had finished his movie and was coming home, Darlene and I imme-

diately went out shopping for a new dress or something cute.

When we got back to our apartment, Darlene whipped a bottle of green fingernail polish out of the sack and began painting her nails.

"You're not going to Graceland wearing green nail polish, are you?" I said.

"Yes," she said.

"Don't be silly," I said. "Who ever heard of green nail polish. Elvis will probably tell you to go home and take it off."

When we arrived at Graceland that night, Elvis met us at the door with a big hug and smile. We had not seen him for so long. But Darlene just walked right by him as if he was not standing there.

Elvis looked after her walking toward the kitchen and yelled, "Darlene, are you mad at me?"

She ambled on as if she had not heard a word he said.

Elvis followed her and caught her at the refrigerator.

"Did I do something that hurt you?" he said. "Was it something I said on the phone from California last week?"

She glanced up at him. "Elvis, I'm not mad at you."

She pulled a bottle of pop out of the refrigerator and took the cap off. "I'm really not," she said.

She walked out toward the living room. Elvis watched her, then followed.

There was a crowd in the living room. There were lots of Elvis' friends from the Memphis area. Some were in from California.

Elvis sat down beside me on the couch but his eyes stayed on Darlene.

"Is she mad or something?" he whispered to me.

"I don't think she is," I said.

He watched her talking to one of the men. She smiled so sweetly. Elvis looked annoyed. Then his eyes went down to the man's shoes and sox and he snorted in contempt.

He nudged me. "Arlene, look at that," he said. "He's got on white sox!" He turned to me as if he was giving me special information. "Always look out for men wearing white sox," he said seriously.

He shook his head. "Poor Darlene has finally got herself mixed up with a man wearing white sox."

We left Graceland just before sunrise the next morning and Darlene was ecstatic.

"Did you see the way Elvis followed me around all night long fascinated with my green nail polish?" she said.

"Yeah, and did you see the way Elvis totally ignored me and Frances all night long?" I said.

She was in seventh heaven.

"Frankly, I don't see how you can carry off such an act," I said. "I couldn't do it.

"What do you think Elvis' reaction would be if *I* tried to act like you do?"

She grabbed my arm. "Try it, Arlene, try it!"

"Are you crazy?" I said. "I don't think I can act that good. I'd probably start laughing."

The next night, when we arrived at Graceland, I just walked right past Elvis at the door.

"Hey, Arlene," he called after me. "Aren't you going to kiss me hello?"

"Maybe later, Elvis," I said, and went on down to the den.

In a minute he came down to the pool room and picked up a cue stick.

"Is anything wrong, honey?" he said.

"No," I said, sitting down and picking up a copy of Photoplay magazine lying on the table.

He sat down next to me and I acted oblivious to him. He leaned over and kissed me and I said, "Excuse me, Elvis."

I got up and went up the stairs and left him sitting there. I felt awful about it.

Elvis started asking people if they knew what was wrong.

He'd pull my chin up and look at me and say, "Are you sure nothing's wrong?"

One night at the Fairgrounds, Elvis was riding in the front car of the roller coaster. Everybody else was almost shoving and pushing, trying to get in. I stood back and watched them.

I had planned on sitting as far back from Elvis as I could but the whole thing filled up too fast for me to get on anywhere.

The roller coaster took off on the next big run and came roaring back in. Elvis looked at me as his car zipped past.

Jean and Pam Drew were visiting from Chicago. I pretended to be in deep discussion with them and not the least bit interested in what Elvis was doing.

When Elvis' lead car stopped, he called back, "Come ride with me, Arlene."

I ignored him. Jean nudged me and said, "Elvis is calling you."

When I looked around, Elvis was standing up in his car. He hollered loud enough to be heard a mile away.

"Damn it, Arlene, come over here and get in this car."

I jumped in the last car. "That one scares me," I called.

On the way back home from the Fairgrounds, I jumped in the back seat of the limousine. I didn't wait, as usual, to see if Elvis wanted me to ride in the front seat with him. All of us usually waited to see what he wanted us to do.

At Graceland I met Darlene in an upstairs dressing room. She was joyful at the way things were working for me.

"He can't keep his eyes off you," she said.

"Darlene, I've done this act about as long as I can," I said. "I can't carry it on much longer. I've been acting unnatural for two weeks!"

"Hold on just one more night," she pleaded.

"All right," I said. "But this is the last night."

Early in the evening, Elvis grabbed my wrists. "Come with me," he said. "I want to talk to you."

We went up to his room and closed the door.

"Now sit down over there and tell me what the hell is wrong," he said, turning.

I sort of crouched back in my chair.

"Well, Darlene and I had this idea," I began, lamely.

He listened to my explanation.

"Well, you know how Darlene sometimes acts indifferent to you," I said. "I decided to act like Darlene to see what your reaction would be."

He listened with a growing smile. He shook his head. "If there is any more of this crazy stuff going on around here, I'll wring *both* your necks," he said.

He came over and sat down by me.

"You always know exactly how I feel toward you," I said. "It *shows*. I never try to hide my feelings from you."

He smiled. "That's the way you are. That's the way I love you to be. I couldn't love you any more if you acted just like Darlene. I couldn't love

Darlene any more if she acted just like you.

"I don't want either one of you to change. I love each of you the way you are and for who you are."

He lifted my chin.

"I'll always feel this way," he said.

After a while, we went downstairs and walked back into the music room. Elvis sat down at the piano and began singing. Others began drifting in when they heard the piano.

The instrument could also be played as an organ.

Elvis played entirely by ear. It was always beautiful. He had his own style of playing and it was marvelous to hear.

Often he would sing a song with a girl's name in it. If there was a girl with that name in the room he would sing the song straight to her alone. It made the girl feel wonderful.

Usually, I would say, "Why doesn't anybody ever write a song for a girl named Arlene? I feel left out. Why don't they, Elvis?"

That night he surprised me.

Toward the end of the little concert, he looked across at me.

"I tried to think of a song about a girl named Arlene," he told us. "I don't know of a single one ever written. I promised Arlene that, some day, I would do a song for her."

There was a song that was popular, called, "Good Night, Irene." Elvis began playing it and substituting my name.

"Good night, Arlene, good night. I'll see you in my dreams."

He sang the whole song that way. I just beamed. I loved him and it showed all over me.

Elvis winked at me. "Didn't I promise you a

song?" he said.

Elvis wanted us all to get out on the town the next night. He got us all tickets to go see Holiday on Ice. The long line of Graceland cars drove out the gate and headed downtown that night. When we got to the coliseum, Elvis drove around to the alley and stopped under the fire escape.

Everybody got out and stared up at the ladder on the side of the wall. In single file we all went up and entered through the back of the hall. Elvis did not want his presence to disrupt the show that was going on.

The ushers met us when we came in. They led us quickly to our seats right down on the front row of the balcony.

Frances and I sat on either side of Elvis. He bought popcorn for the three of us. Nobody else, for some reason.

It was a beautiful ice show with gorgeous colored lights bouncing off the ice and lovely costumes and romantic, breathtaking acts.

Elvis leaned forward to look down over the side of the balcony at the people below us on the main floor.

The show's announcer broke in to announce that Elvis Presley was in the house that night. They went on with the show but everyone was turning around and trying to locate Elvis.

"Oh, no," muttered Elvis.

"What's wrong?" Frances said.

His hand went to his mouth. "I think I just lost a cap," he said. "I felt it come out of my mouth when I leaned forward. It's somewhere down there, right under us."

In the dark, we all leaned forward and looked down.

"See that woman with the big nest of hair on

top of her head?" Elvis said. "I bet it fell in there and we'll never find it."

He signaled to Lamar.

"Get a flashlight from the usher," Elvis told him. "Go down there and look around on the floor and see if you can find that cap off my tooth. I dropped it where that woman is with all the hair."

From time to time during the rest of the show, we would look down over the side of the balcony. Lamar was down there, the beam from his flashlight moving around in the dark under the chairs.

The cap was never found.

Shortly after we all got home that night, Heidi became quite upset. She came up to me and Frances. She said there were three girls in the house who intended to replace us.

"What three girls?" Frances said.

Heidi pointed to the three girls sitting together in the living room. "Those three," she said.

Frances looked a little worried. "Which one of them told you that?" she said.

"They *all* told me that," she said.

Frances looked at me. "Do you think, maybe, that Elvis is getting tired of us — and he's using them to let us know?"

"Where did they come from?" I asked.

"Oh, I've seen them down at the gate at times," Frances said.

Mack came by. I touched his arm and he stopped.

"Mack, have you seen those three girls before?" I said.

He looked at them and shrugged. "Nah. They're probably some girls who were down at the gate," he said.

The three girls were beautifully dressed and they had gracious manners. They looked so cool,

so in control of themselves. I began to really think we three might be on the way out. Maybe Elvis was outgrowing us.

"I'm going to ask him," Heidi said.

We went to find him. He was talking to some people at the front door who were just leaving. When they had gone and he turned around, Heidi said, "Elvis, do you want us to leave? I mean, for good."

He looked startled. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"If you don't want us around, just let us know and we won't be," Heidi said.

Frances nodded. "That goes for all of us, Elvis. You don't have to be diplomatic about it."

He got mad. "Where are you coming up with this crap? If I don't want you around, *I'll* let you know. What is this?"

I told him what the three girls in the living room had told Heidi. Elvis moved a couple of steps back and took a look at the three of them. Then he came back.

"I don't know 'em," he said. "I think they came with Lamar. I think he got 'em in. Don't listen to people like that. If you want to know anything, just come to me with it — the way you just did. Don't you ever listen to *anyone* but me.

"*Y'all are not going anywhere.* Right here is where you are staying. And if I ever don't want you around anymore, I'll be the one to tell you. Not three girls, not *anyone*! Have I made myself clear?"

He put his arm around Heidi's shoulder and kissed her.

"Go in there and tell them you girls will be at Graceland long after they're gone," he said.

I don't recall seeing the three girls anymore.

CHAPTER 13

"Kiss Me, Darlin'."

On one of the first summer nights that year, Elvis watched an inflated raft drift across the swimming pool.

"I got an idea," he told Mack Gurley who was sitting near him. "Go down to the mall and buy us a couple of dozen of those rafts."

We had all dressed out for a swim party. Elvis, as usual, came up with a brand new twist.

I sat with him, waiting for Mack to run down to the mall and back. He watched Lamar go out to the end of the diving board, make one neat bounce and go slicing down quietly into the pool.

Elvis shook his head and smiled.

"Lamar, as big as he is, doesn't even make a splash when he dives in a pool," he said. "I don't understand it."

When Mack got back, everybody helped blow up air mattresses.

"You know what I've got in my pocket?" Mack said, between puffs into a mattress.

"No, what?" I said.

"A blank check signed by Elvis Presley," Mack

said. "Elvis gave it to me to buy the rafts with. The store wouldn't take it. So I went ahead and paid for all this from my own pocket."

Mack blew air into his mattress. "There's no telling what amount I could write on this check and get some bank to cash," he said. "I could be rich."

He puffed some more. "Of course, Elvis knows I wouldn't do anything like that. But somebody else sure might try."

Everybody started throwing inflated rafts in the swimming pool.

Elvis told everybody what the game was. They had to dive off the diving board and come down on top of one of the air floats and try to sink it.

"He turns everything into a game," Mack said.

Frances nodded. "Exactly."

Elvis went off the diving board first. He landed on an air mattress. His dive took the mattress down deep into the pool — and then popped him back out of the water like a cork exploding out of a bottle of champagne.

Elvis had a surprised and totally delighted look on his face.

All the guys headed for the diving board.

"That *does* look like fun," Mack said.

The girls decided this one was just for the guys. We just sat and watched them keep going off the diving board until they finally sank all the air floats in the pool.

We went upstairs to different dressing rooms to change clothes after we swam a while. Elvis was so unpredictable in his plans that the girls didn't ever know for sure what to wear when we came to Graceland. We might go dressed for the movies and Elvis would change his mind and say we were going roller skating. He'd have one of the guys

take us home and wait for us and then bring us back.

One night, Elvis told us, "I want each of you to bring one dressy outfit and one casual outfit and hang 'em in my closet upstairs. That way, we won't have to wait around for you to run home and change."

Elvis looked in on us in our dressing room and said, "Dress for some dancing. See you down in the den."

He was playing pool when we got down there.

Others were dancing across the hallway in the den where the record player was. I didn't know all the girls there. Some new ones had been brought in from the gate by some of the guys.

One of the girls went over to the pile of records and put on some fast ones.

Elvis sat down with the cue stick in his hand and started watching the fast dancing. He loved to watch but he never would dance himself.

"Naw, I can't dance to that fast stuff," he said. "But I like to watch y'all do it."

His leg was always bouncing to the beat or his hand was slapping the rhythm on something.

"Too bad you can't dance to that," I said.

He looked at me, got up and began doing The Twist. He did the whole dance, fast and smooth. He came to a flashy pose at the end of the record. Then he just turned and strolled back to the pool table.

I was amazed. We all stood with our mouths hanging open.

"Elvis Presley," I said. "You told me you couldn't dance fast."

He looked up with a puzzled look on his face. "Oh, really?"

In his black pants and white ruffled shirt, Elvis

had looked like the dancing star of some big stage show. Moving like that had to come naturally to him.

There were mirrors all over Graceland. Elvis could have used them to practice on and check his moves. He had mentioned once that ballet schools use wall mirrors to help students study their own movements and perfect them.

Often I would catch him glancing at himself as he passed a mirror. He was always making sure his tie was straight and that his hair was perfect.

Elvis was in another teasing mood that night. When he walked into the living room later, where I was talking to Frances, he sat down on her side of the couch. He grabbed her and gave her a big kiss. Then he leaned forward and looked down the long couch at me and grinned.

In a minute, he came and sat by me and began playing with my pony tail.

"Arlene has a horse tail," Elvis told the people sitting around us.

"It's a real horse's tail," he said. He lifted it up high and looked at the back of my neck. "Yeah, it's a real horse tail, all right."

I blushed the color of a ripe tomato.

Elvis saw me blush and he laughed with childish delight. "Look at Arlene blush," he said.

Bobby made some comment about it in one of his funny voices and Elvis laughed even harder. He lifted up my pony tail again.

"Please, Elvis," I said, trying to smile but afraid I was going to start crying.

I knew he could be embarrassed easily. So I decided to get even with him.

When he got up to go in to the pool room with Bobby, I called out, "Oh, Elvis."

He turned and looked at me. "Yeah?"

I smiled. "I really like those tight black pants. There's something in the way you fill them out — in the rear. Especially when you walk *away* from us. You've just got the cutest butt I ever saw."

He frowned and blushed deep. "Arlene, cut that out," he said.

"Let us see it again, Elvis," I said.

He said, "That's enough, Arlene." He looked really uncomfortable. And his blush was even deeper. He turned and walked out of the room as straight as you please.

Riding home that night with the girls, I said, "I am so mad at him. He nearly made me cry tonight. I am just sick."

I asked Darlene if she would go with me to the beauty shop the next morning.

That night when I walked in the front door at Graceland, I no longer had a long dark pony tail.

My hair was cut short. It gave me a funny feeling — but I did not want Elvis again to comment on my "horse tail."

Elvis saw me as I came in. He nodded but kept on talking to one of his people. And this was a person who never missed the slightest detail about you. He was the most observant man I had ever known. Nothing escaped his eyes.

I began to avoid him. If he was in the kitchen, I headed for the living room. When he came in there, I went to the den or out on the patio.

"What's the matter with you tonight?' Frances said.

I told her what had happened. "I like your new cut," she said. "I'm sure Elvis does, too. He just hasn't had a chance to tell you."

"He's had a lot of chances, Frances," I said. "I feel like crying."

We were about to leave when Elvis called after me.

"Arlene, wait a minute," he said. "Come here, honey."

I walked back and stood facing him.

"Turn around," he said. "Let me see the back."

I turned a little.

"Some more," he said.

I did.

"I like it," he said. "It looks very good on you."

He took my shoulders and turned me around. "You look just beautiful tonight," he said.

He lifted my chin. "Darlin', don't you know yet? If I didn't love you I wouldn't tease you about your hair or anything. Don't take everything so seriously."

Not long after, I came down with a case of hepatitis. I was terrified when the doctor told me what it was. Elvis' mother had died of hepatitis. I immediately thought I was going to die. The doctor put me in the hospital.

Elvis was due to come home in just one week. I had never missed a day with him.

I called home in near hysterics and told mother I had fallen ill with the same thing that killed Elvis' mother.

"The whole gang had to take shots so they wouldn't get it," I wailed.

Mother got my doctor on the phone. He reassured her that I had a mild case. I would live but he wanted to keep me in the bed for a few weeks. I had to have treatment to avoid a relapse, the doctor warned.

"Your father and I are coming down to Memphis soon," mother said. "We hope Elvis will be there this time. We always miss him.

"Just take care of yourself and do exactly what the doctor tells you."

The second day after Elvis got home, I called Graceland. I was missing everything. I couldn't stand it.

Elvis came on the phone and I said, "I had to talk to you. I miss you. I want to be out of this hospital so bad."

Elvis said, "You just stay where you are. It really scared me when I heard you had hepatitis because of my mother — I would come up to see you but it would cause too much commotion in the hospital."

The doctor let me out on the ninth day. After I begged him and pleaded and promised I would go *straight home to bed* and stay there for three weeks.

As soon as I left the hospital I went directly to a friend's house to ask her to touch up my hair. I had changed my hair color to blond.

To dry my hair afterwards, we jumped in her car and went for a drive with the top down.

When we came back I called Graceland. Alberta said everyone was going to the Fairgrounds that night after the place closed at midnight.

Elvis was driving a Dodgem that night when I got to the Fairgrounds. He was slamming into jammed cars and bumping past anyone near him. He loved it.

I walked over and leaned against the railing to watch.

When he came around the corner he saw me standing there. He looked surprised.

He jumped off his car and came over and put his arms around me.

"You're supposed to be in the hospital," he said.

"I'm right where I want to be," I said.

When we all got back to Graceland, dawn had not quite come. The peacocks were up on top of the roof, screaming a strange kind of welcome as we drove up.

Elvis got out of the car and looked up at the sky. It had a strange clarity. Stars were as bright as they sometimes are from the top of a mountain.

"Just look at those stars," Elvis said. "Did you ever see a prettier night?"

We went downstairs to the den after making sandwiches. Everybody was happy and talking. The music seemed louder than usual.

Vernon called to Elvis from the top of the stairs. "Can y'all hold it down a little bit, Elvis?" he said. "I can't sleep, son."

Elvis walked over to the bottom of the stairs. "Sure, daddy. I'm sorry we woke you up."

"Thanks, son," Vernon said.

Several of us were talking in Elvis' room when the sun finally came up. Elvis glanced at a clock by his bed. Seeing that it was no longer dark outside, he went to a window facing the front gate. There was a telescope set up.

Elvis motioned us to come look through it. It was aimed down at the front gate.

"Come see what I brought back with me from California," he said.

He looked through the lens and smiled. "Here," he said, straightening up, "look at this. You can see everything going on down around the gate. See that guy chewing gum? You can almost read the paper that he's holding in his hand. You can even see the mole on his cheek."

I wondered why Elvis wanted the telescope. Maybe he wanted to see who was down at the gate at times when he didn't feel like going down there.

Mr. Presley was down in the kitchen eating

breakfast when I came down. He asked me to eat with him.

"Mother says she and dad will be coming down to Memphis soon," I said. "They're still trying to meet Elvis."

"It'll be nice seeing your mother again," he said. "When are they coming?"

"Pretty soon, I understand," I said, starting some toast and pouring lots of cream in my coffee.

"Elvis asleep?" he said.

I nodded.

"I always worry about him sleep walking," he said. "He got up once and walked right out of the house before we caught him."

As we talked, a wind began to blow. Dark clouds swept in from the west.

I finished my toast and coffee. Loud thunder cracked overhead.

"I'm going to look outside and see what's going on," I said.

When I opened the front door it surprised me to see Elvis sitting on the porch.

"Elvis, you're awake. What are you doing out here?" I said.

"Watching the lightning," he said. "The sky is so black. We may have a tornado before it's over."

"Aren't you scared to be sitting out here?" I said.

He grinned. "Naw. I like to watch it. Are you scared?"

I looked at the black twisting clouds through the trees. "I think I am," I said.

In a few minutes, he got up and yawned and said he was going to try to go to sleep again.

His father drove me home.

Elvis was gone again when my folks were finally able to come down again.

I called Vernon and he said to bring them out and spend Sunday afternoon there. I told him my brother, Larry, had come with them.

"The more the merrier," Vernon said.

My father was an attorney. He would watch me through his horn rimmed glasses as I talked about spending evenings with Elvis and his friends and coming back home the next day. His big dark eyes would look puzzled. He had never known anyone whose normal day began in the late evening and ended around noon the following day.

He was very attentive when Vernon took us all on a tour of the house and grounds that Sunday afternoon.

Dad admired the fountain very much.

Vernon said, "The fountain was Elvis' idea."

Every time my father admired something, Vernon would say, "Elvis wanted it done that way."

My father finally turned to Vernon and said, "Mr. Presley, tell me something."

"What's that, Mr. Cogan?" Vernon said.

"What do you think about having these kids up here all night long and into the next day and never going home?" my father asked.

Vernon said, "Mr. Cogan, let me tell you something about all these kids.

"Elvis was always a good boy when he was growing up. We never had to spank him. He's been brought up right and never caused us a minute's trouble or embarrassment.

"Now, these kids that come out here are just like our own family. Elvis wouldn't move without them. He won't leave the house without them.

"If one of them is not here, Elvis paces the floor until they get here. He'll say, 'They ought to be here by now. I wonder what's happened?'

"Everything he does, it has to be with these kids. Elvis loves them. I love them. Gladys loved them when she was alive. They're like our own kids now.

"This is Elvis' home, too. But if they do get too loud and I can't sleep, I tell them to hold it down and they mind me. They're considerate and thoughtful of me. I've never had any problem. A lot of times, I join right in with them. I go along with them and have as much fun as they do."

My father stood listening to the kind of answer he had not expected from Elvis' father.

Frances and I were talking privately with mother about personal things about Elvis.

"If a girl really wants to go to bed with him," I said, "she might make it. But she won't be seen up there again.

"Elvis loves to be alone with us. He says he can pour out his heart to us in a way he never can with a bunch of guys.

"He's more relaxed when he's with us. Free to show his emotions.

"Elvis' mother said Elvis told her once, 'Just because I take ten girls upstairs with me at night doesn't mean I sleep with all of them. I just like to talk to them.'

"His mother knew Elvis respected us and there was no real hanky panky going on. She knew Elvis would do nothing that would hurt any of us."

Mother asked Frances about Elvis' bedroom when she met her again the next day.

"Well," Frances said, "we all like to sit up there. I think Elvis relates to women easier when he's in a mood to talk to someone. If something is really bothering him he wants to be with us, it looks like.

"That's what a lot of the times up in his room

are all about. I think we're somebody he can talk to that he knows he can trust completely.

"We can give him reassurance. I don't really think he's a real secure person. Oh, he comes across like one, especially in a crowd. But he's not."

Frances smiled. "Also, Elvis is a little older. Maybe we make him feel young," she quipped.

Mother seemed to be satisfied about things.

Because of the nine days that I had spent in the hospital with hepatitis, I lost my secretarial job downtown. I couldn't find another one right away.

Elvis began putting on the same record every time I came in. It was by The Drifters and it was titled, "Get A Job."

When I walked in he would come over to me and sing, "Get a job, Arlene, get a job."

I felt as if he was trying to make me feel bad.

Then he'd ask me, "Did you find a job today?"

I wondered if he thought I was too lazy to work.

One evening we were all in the living room. He called across to me, "Arlene, did you get a job?"

It really hurt my feelings. I got up and walked out of the room.

He came out after me. He saw the tears welling in my eyes.

He hugged me. "Don't take it so seriously," he said. "Look, I know what it's like, looking for a job. I wouldn't kid you about it if I didn't care about you. Don't be so serious all the time.

"Kiss me, darlin'."

CHAPTER 14

Goodbye To Soda Bars

Frances looked surprised and saddened one night at a little party up at Graceland. Heidi and I were putting records on the stereo. Frances came over.

"What's the matter, Frances?" Heidi said.

Frances looked around the room. She looked as if she felt a little uneasy.

"It's changed," she said.

"What's changed?" Heidi said.

"One night, I'm out here and there's a soda fountain — right over there," she said. "The next night — it's my eighteenth birthday — and the soda fountain is gone. There's a liquor bar sitting there in its place."

She looked around at all the guys and girls with glasses in their hands. The drinks didn't look like Pepsis any more.

"This is the first time I ever saw a drink taken at Graceland," Frances said.

We nodded.

Frances sort of laughed. "It sounds dumb, but I keep thinking, 'Gosh, that's a *bar* over there.' "

We were all eighteen, or nearly so. I figured Elvis thought it was all right to put a wet bar in the house if we were now that old.

Somebody asked us to dance. Frances said she didn't want to dance right then.

"I don't feel very much like dancing tonight," Frances said. "I may go up in Elvis' room and read or something."

"Are you all right?" I said.

She nodded.

Elvis overheard the little conversation when he came in. He held out his glass to Frances. It was red.

"Taste this, Frances," he said.

"What is it?" Frances said.

Elvis smiled. "Something I think you'll like," he said. "Here, try it."

Frances tasted it and made a face.

Elvis said, "You don't like it?"

"It's all right," she said. "Oh, maybe a little sweet. I guess it tastes pretty good."

Elvis called Lamar over. "Make one of these for Frances," he said.

Lamar hurried over to the bar and began mixing.

He was back in a minute with a tall red drink for Frances. It was a slender glass and had a lot of ice in it.

"Drink a little of it, Frances," Elvis said. He had stayed to talk with her while Lamar made the drink.

Frances sipped it. She looked at the glass a moment. "It tastes a little like spicy almonds," she said. She sipped again. "It really is pretty good."

Elvis drank his. "I thought you'd like it," he said. He called Lamar back. "Don't let her glass run dry," he said.

Lamar nodded.

"Now wait a minute," Frances said.

Elvis smiled. "It's not all that strong," he said. "It's mostly taste. Don't worry about it, Frances."

Frances sat down on the arm of a chair and talked with Elvis. When her glass got a little low, Elvis called Lamar.

"Lamar, you're not looking after Frances," he said.

Lamar took her glass and refilled it, mixing several things together at the bar. Later on, as Elvis passed me, he asked me where Frances was. I hadn't noticed that she was out of the room until then.

In a couple of minutes, one of the guys upstairs hollered down the steps, "Elvis, come up here."

I went upstairs with Elvis.

We walked through to the front of the house. There was Frances, sitting underneath the dining room table.

"What are you doing, little Frances?" Elvis said.

She just sat there and looked at us. There were tears on her cheeks.

Elvis knelt down and said, "Frances, what are you doing, darlin'?"

She shook her head like a child who does not choose to answer.

"What are you doing under there, honey?" Elvis said.

"I was just thinking," she finally said, in a voice that was hoarse with some kind of sadness.

"What were you thinking about, darlin'?" Elvis said.

Frances shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "It all just seems very, very sad, Elvis." She

looked at him intently. "Don't you think?"

Elvis couldn't keep from laughing.

Then he put his glass on the table and reached a hand underneath to her.

"Come on out, honey," he said. "Uncle Elvis wants you to feel happy. He doesn't like for you to be sad." He stretched his hand out. "Come on, honey. Grab my hand."

Finally she took his hand. Elvis helped her up and hugged her. He looked over at me and said, "Arlene, will you take Frances in the kitchen and get her some coffee?"

A few nights later, we were sitting in the kitchen. Elvis was at the end of the counter, singing to Heidi.

Heidi had the sweetest and happiest look on her face. Elvis was singing a love song to her, alone.

Elvis had a way of taking everything to the limit and beyond — and that included his love of teasing us.

He began teasing Frances as he sang. He would sing a line of a love ballad to Heidi and look straight into her adoring eyes. Then he would look across the room at Frances.

"Little Frances is over there watching us, Heidi," he said.

He sang another couple of lines. He leaned forward and smiled his mischievous smile at Frances again. "I think Little Frances is jealous of you, Heidi," he said.

Of course, everyone else in the room would laugh along with Elvis. Everyone but Frances.

Then Elvis sang another couple of lines and leaned forward to smile at Frances in a devilish way. He put his hand on Heidi's shoulder. "Look,

Heidi," he said. "Little Frances looks *very* jealous of you."

Elvis ended the song with a little kiss on Heidi's lips. He turned to tease Frances again. "Little Frances" suddenly turned red in the face. She began yelling things at Elvis. They were things I had never, ever heard *anybody* say to Elvis.

Elvis' face went white with shock. He came up out of his chair. They stood facing each other — hollering at the top of their voices.

Everybody was so shocked they couldn't move.

Elvis lunged across the kitchen. He grabbed Frances by the back of her neck and started hustling her toward the back door.

I was scared to death.

I looked at Heidi. She had a shocked look on her face as if she could not believe that Elvis would actually grab Frances by the neck and toss her right out the back door. Heidi clenched her hands and held them straight at her side.

Heidi was about to say something and I whispered, "Don't argue with him now."

She shook her head. I knew she never had argued with Elvis about anything. She didn't like to argue.

Frances refused to back down from Elvis. She kept yelling at him.

As Elvis shoved her out the back door, he yelled, "Don't *ever* come back up here!"

"I'm going after Frances," Heidi said. "I want to make sure she's all right." She slipped out another way.

Frances got in her mother's car and slammed the door. Heidi jumped in right behind her.

"I'm leaving, too," Heidi said.

They drove around while Heidi tried to calm Frances down.

Frances boo-hooed so bad she could hardly see to drive.

"I feel just like hitting a tree and killing myself," Frances wailed.

"Oh, Frances," Heidi said, "Elvis didn't mean anything. He just blew up. He'll get over it."

Frances shook her head. "No, he won't," she said. "But I don't feel like letting *anybody* run all over me the way he did."

After an hour of driving around, Frances calmed down enough to go home.

Two days later, Heidi, Frances, Darlene, and I were driving around town in the late afternoon. We were wondering what was going on at Graceland that night.

"Well, I know *I* can't go back up there," Frances said, her chin stuck out bravely.

"Yes, you can," Darlene said.

"I can't," Frances said. "You heard what he told me — and the stuff I said. He's not going to forget. Not Elvis."

"I bet he will," I said. We drove a few more blocks in silence, each trying to imagine what would happen if Frances did show up at Graceland that night.

Elvis had already told us he didn't want to hear her name mentioned around Graceland any more.

Heidi wanted to forget and let it die. Frances was still feeling like a fighter.

"Let's just go on up there and see what happens," Heidi said, in her nice and gentle way.

Frances shook her head. She absolutely would not go.

We kept talking — and talking — and talking.

The next afternoon, Heidi, Darlene and I were in the living room with Elvis.

Joe Esposito came in and said Frances was on the phone.

Elvis just sat there and didn't answer.

Joe said, "She wants to come up and talk to you, Elvis."

Elvis didn't answer.

"Can she come up and talk to you, Elvis?" Joe said, after a minute of silence.

Elvis just sat there. Finally he said, "All right. Let her come up."

After a bit, Frances walked in.

We all looked up and waited. Nobody dared to move or speak.

Elvis got up and looked at her.

Then, in a hokey voice of a ringside announcer at a wrestling match, he droned, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, in this corner, Little Frances, weighing in soaking wet at ninety pounds . . ."

We all relaxed and laughed. Elvis' humor told us that the war had ended.

Elvis had a beautiful smile as he walked over and hugged Frances.

She slowly relaxed and put her arms around him.

We all sighed with relief. It was good to see them love each other again. None of us was ever jealous of a show of real love.

A few nights later, we called up at the house and asked what was planned.

Ray Sitton, whom Elvis had nicknamed Chief, answered the phone. "Elvis is going skating," he said.

I said, "What are you doing up there, Chief?"

We had met Chief down at the gate several times and he had been around to give us rides

whenever Elvis wasn't in town. It surprised me to hear him answer the phone.

"Elvis asked me to work for him," Chief said.

I had never heard him sound so very business like.

That night, when we were all going out to the cars to go to the skating rink, Elvis noticed that Heidi had not arrived. He asked where she was. Nobody knew.

Heidi arrived at the skating rink late.

"Where were you?" I asked her when she got her skates on and came out on the floor with the rest of us.

"I was just talking to this guy," she said.

"What guy?" I said.

"You haven't met him," she said. "He's a real nice guy."

I nodded.

A few minutes later, a good looking guy came in and sat down on the side and watched. He had a friend with him. Heidi had noticed him come in. She waved to him and he waved back.

The next time around, Heidi swung off the floor and skated over to sit down by the guy a minute. Then she came back out to the floor.

"I told him he could come out here tonight if he wanted to," she told me.

"Is he going to skate?" I said.

"No," Heidi said.

Elvis never missed a thing. But he made no sign that he had seen the two strangers come in or that Heidi had gone over to talk to them.

But he had an intuitive sense for everything around him.

On one of the turns, Heidi lost her balance and her skates skidded out from under her.

It wasn't a real bad fall but Elvis saw it and

went racing over and knelt down beside her.

He began kissing her and caressing her and saying, "Heidi, darlin', are you hurt? Is everything all right?"

She said, "I'm fine, Elvis. Don't worry."

Elvis helped her up and hugged her. "Who is that guy over there?" he said. "Who is he?"

"Oh, he's just a guy, Elvis," Heidi said.

"Just a guy?" he said. "What were y'all talking about over there? What's his name?"

"Tony Sansone," Heidi said. "He's just a guy — nothing else."

Elvis skated around the floor with Heidi for a while.

When I met her in the ladies room, she shook her head.

"This is really funny," she said. "Elvis is acting jealous of *me*! He's showing Tony that Elvis is Number One with me."

"I saw that," I said.

She smiled. "Elvis wants us to love him forever and ever," she said. "And he's trying to say, what the heck is this guy doing, talking to me?"

"That's Elvis' possessiveness," I said.

She seemed bemused by strange thoughts.

"Are you going to marry Tony?" I said.

Heidi looked puzzled. "I have no idea," she said. "He's *just* a *guy*."

A couple of nights later, Elvis took everybody out to the Fairgrounds after it had closed to the public. He loved to wander around and talk to people and smoke his cigars and operate the rides.

Frances and I were watching the man make pronto pups for us. Alan Fortas came along and asked Frances to ride the Rocket with him.

They walked off toward the Rocket.

Half an hour later I saw Frances at the Dodgem

cars. "Elvis did it again," she said.

"What?" I said.

"He came by and saw me riding the Rocket with Alan," she said. "We were the only two riding. He stopped and took over the controls from the man who works them.

"He started speeding it up. After a while I thought the damn thing was just going to fly off the tracks every time it went over the top.

"Me and Alan were holding on for dear life.

"Elvis was sitting out there at the controls, just sitting there watching us."

"I'll bet he was getting a kick out of it," I said. "He was just having a little fun with you guys."

"No, it wasn't that," Frances said. "You always like to think the best of him. Elvis was *jealous* of Alan. Making that thing fly around the tracks with us was his way of saying, 'Frances, you're not supposed to ride with Alan.' "

On the way home from the Fairgrounds, Elvis stopped to talk to the fans and sign autographs. He'd been away and he missed spending some time with them.

We always thought of Elvis as the man he really was — not as the world's most famous and loved entertainer. Only when we were out in public, seeing crowds absolutely hysterical at the mere sight of him, only then did we look at him and say to ourselves, *"My God, this is Elvis Presley and I'm with the most famous person on earth!"*

I was standing beside him as he signed autographs and talked to the crowd.

He leaned down and whispered in my ear, "Arlene, I want you to take off five pounds."

One of the girls near me giggled. "What did Elvis say?" she asked me, thinking it was something romantic.

"Oh, just something real sweet," I said, smiling at her.

"Elvis," I said, touching his arm.

He looked down. "Yeah?"

"Bend down so I can whisper something back to you," I said. Elvis winked at the fans and bent his head down. "Yeah?"

"Do you think I'm fat?" I whispered.

He put his arm around my shoulder and whispered in my ear, "Take off five pounds. It'll make you look terrific."

I had not weighed since moving down to Memphis from Chicago. When I got home I weighed myself — and I had gained exactly five pounds.

Elvis noticed every detail about the people around him. He saw everything.

Elvis had to go back out to Hollywood to do some work at a studio, in connection with his last movie, and he was gone a few days.

Darlene and I were driving around one night and we decided to stop at the gate and talk to Uncle Vester. We didn't know if we wanted to go over to Patsy's house or maybe to the little coffee shop on McLemore where we often went when Elvis was out of town.

Uncle Vester said, "Elvis got in from California a little while ago."

"Great," Darlene said. "He got back a little early, for a change."

"He left word he isn't going to see anyone tonight," Uncle Vester said. "There was a couple of movie stars came by. Right after supper. Elvis said tell them he was resting and didn't want to see anybody."

"The house is his only privacy," Darlene said.

"He's not supposed to entertain everybody that shows up at his door, is he?"

"No, not to my way of thinking," Uncle Vester said. "But some of these people get mad at me when I don't let them go up there. Boy, do they fume."

The phone in the guardhouse rang. Uncle Vester picked it up. "Oh, there's a big bunch down here tonight," he said.

He listened and then said, "Arlene and Darlene are here with me."

When he hung up the phone he said, "Elvis said send both of you up."

We went up to the house. He was waiting for us upstairs. He hugged and kissed us. "Don't tell the rest of the gang you were up here tonight," he said.

He seemed depressed.

"I got a call from a pawn shop down on Beale," he said.

He took a gold watch out of a drawer and held it up. It was one of the special watches Elvis bought as gifts for his closest friends.

"How'd it get in a pawn shop?" I said.

He put it back in the drawer and shut it.

"I gave it to somebody who said they always wanted something they could carry around in remembrance of me," he said.

There were tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER 15

"Y'all will leave me . . ."

Heidi was gone a while.

She came back one night. She seemed a bit more serious than usual.

"It's funny, the way things happen," she said, walking outside on the patio with me.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"I always sort of assumed that we would all be together forever," she said. "Elvis said we'd all be gray and crippled and he'd roll down the driveway in his wheelchair to meet us.

"Things don't work out that way."

"Are you serious about Tony?" I said.

"Tony?" she said. "Yeah, I guess I am. It seems the natural thing to do." She looked out across the back meadow. "I guess Elvis is too busy for me. I think he always will be."

After a while, we went back in the house.

Elvis was downstairs playing pool. When he came upstairs he saw Heidi and he came over and sat down beside her.

He kissed her and talked to her quietly. He kissed her again.

"I guess you know," he said, "that you get prettier every day to me."

Heidi told me later, "It was the sweetest thing Elvis has ever said to me.

"It's absolutely the prettiest thing anyone has ever said to me. But there was something so sad about it.

"You know how everyone around him tries to spy on everybody else — and run to him with it. Somebody must have told him I'm dating Tony."

She looked at me. "I'm blue," she whispered. "I feel like I'm getting older."

Heidi was just seventeen.

"I know Elvis loves me," she said, "but I can just hang around here the rest of my life and be someone he loves. But I want more than that. Maybe I'm just too young for him. He has all these beautiful stars eyeing him.

"Any one of us could marry him. He says so himself but we don't really believe it's going to happen."

Tony began showing up at the skating rink a lot after that.

You could see that Elvis felt Heidi was drifting away from him. He would ask me and Frances, "Who's that guy over there with Heidi?"

Elvis didn't like Tony. Tony never skated with us. He just sat and waited.

Heidi and Tony soon got married.

Heidi was away from us until the summer. She had a big argument with Tony and came back to see us. She was pregnant.

One of the guys saw her walking with Frances, out at the Fairgrounds one night at a party and he yelled, "Hey, Heidi. I understand you're engaged."

It was not a nice thing to say. Heidi muttered,

"Why don't those guys crawl in a hole. What *creeps.*"

Sometimes it looked as if some of the people around Elvis were getting jealous of everyone else.

Ray Sitton had a nice car. He was tickled to death to take us anywhere we wanted to go if we didn't have transportation. He liked to talk to the girls and kid us.

Earl brought him up to the house one night. Elvis couldn't seem to remember his name so he began calling him Chief. So Chief became his name. Not long after that, Elvis announced that Chief was now going to be working for him.

Chief was a devoted employee. He thought a lot of Elvis and was proud to work for him. He was attentive — and if Elvis put a cigar in his mouth, he ran to light it for him.

Then he started acting differently toward us. When Darlene and I would call up to the house to ask what time Elvis wanted us to be there that night, Chief often answered the phone with surprising coolness.

He began saying, "Elvis doesn't want to do anything tonight."

We'd say, "Are you sure?"

Chief would say, "Elvis doesn't want to do anything tonight."

It was as if they wanted to drop a veil in front of Elvis — or build a little fence around him and keep him all to themselves.

So, Darlene and I would drive around.

One night, about one in the morning, she and I stopped at the gate. While we were there, Elvis called. He wanted to know who was down there.

"Arlene and Darlene are here," the guard said.

"Good," Elvis said. "Tell them to come on up."

Talking to a fan.

Chief was upstairs with Elvis when we came in. We looked at him with acid in our eyes.

Elvis looked up and repeated one of the phrases he liked to use a lot, "Now, just arriving are Arlene and Darlene."

"Hi," I said.

"Where the hell have y'all been?" Elvis said.

"You didn't want to see us," Darlene said.

"Who told you that?" Elvis said.

We glared at Chief. He got up and left the room.

"Chief's been giving us a hard time on the phone, every time we call up here," Darlene said. "For weeks, it seems."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Elvis said.

"We didn't want to start trouble," Darlene said.

"Well, how am I supposed to know something like this is going on if nobody tells me?" Elvis said.

"Look, I'll take care of Chief. Forget it."

Still, the little barriers seemed to keep going up. The little screens became heavier. Jealousies became more keen.

One day, I happened to be downtown and I stopped in at Lansky Brothers. I saw a pair of red pants and a white ruffled shirt that I knew Elvis would look fabulous in. I bought them. Then I went by a jewelry shop and bought an identification bracelet and had Elvis' name engraved on it. I took the picture of Elvis and me, taken at the skating rink, and cut it in half. I placed the picture of me in the center of the compartment of the bracelet.

Elvis loved it. He put it right on, then and there, and showed it to everyone. He was very proud of it. That made me so happy.

Shortly after, I saw it upstairs on his night stand. It had an ugly scratch across the face of it.

I cried. "Who did that?" I said.

Elvis shook his head. "I'll wear it anyway, darlin'."

A boy named Gordon showed up in Frances' life just as she was saying she thought it was time to find out what was going on in the outside world.

"We lead a protected life up here," she said, one night.

"Mostly, I want a boy I don't have to share with everyone else. This is ridiculous. I'm having a sense of possessiveness now."

We were all up in Elvis' room one night and Elvis was loving on us. Frances got up and walked out.

Elvis followed her outside and they exchanged some words. Elvis came back in but Frances left.

When we'd go to the Fairgrounds, Frances began showing up with Gordon.

One night, I was down in the kitchen, talking on the phone to a guy I knew. As we talked on, suddenly I heard Elvis' voice on the extension. "*Arlene,*" he was saying, "*I hope you're having a good time. I hope you're having a damn good time.*"

"*That was Elvis, wasn't it!*" the guy on the phone said, real excited.

Elvis came downstairs and began pacing back and forth in front of me, waiting for me to hang up. When I didn't, he flipped a switch beside the phone. Our telephone conversation was piped into the public address system throughout the kitchen. I tried to talk low but it didn't help.

"*That was Elvis, wasn't it?*" the guy repeated on the other end of the line.

Everybody was listening and grinning.

"*Wasn't that Elvis who . . . ?*" he started out.

"Look, I have to hang up now," I said.

"Y'all will leave me . . . "

"But wasn't that . . . ?"
I hung up the phone.

As Christmas grew closer, I got a job in a department store downtown. A girl I met behind the perfume counter asked me to go on a double date with her one night so she wouldn't be alone with the guy.

I had driven her out to the Naval Air Station at Millington to see a sailor one night. While I waited for her, one of the guards came over with his flashlight and checked me out.

The guard turned out to be my date on the double date. His name was Ken Bradley and he was from Detroit. Two weeks later he asked me to marry him.

I saw Ken whenever Elvis had to be out of town.

He was to drop me off at the Fairgrounds one night for a party with Elvis.

"Why can't I go in?" he said, when I got out of the car. "Are you ashamed of me?"

"Kenny, I'm not supposed to have dates," I said. "But just keep calm and I'll go in and check to see if it's all right."

I ran inside. I didn't see Elvis' limousine.

"He called and said he would be coming later," one of the guys said.

This is my chance, I figured, to bring Kenny in, give him a ride and get him out before Elvis arrived.

We got on one ride and the operator walked away from it for a few minutes.

"Isn't that Elvis?" Kenny said.

When the ride spun us around again, I looked, and it *was* Elvis standing there at the gate of the ride. He had one hand on his hip. The other hand

on the gate. He had an unhappy look. Angry.

Elvis walked away.

The operator returned and stopped the ride. We got off — I wanted Ken to leave.

As we stood there facing each other, here came Elvis out of nowhere, right in between us, and he shoved Ken so hard that Kenny hit the ground.

Elvis looked at me and proceeded straight ahead.

The quickness of it stunned me. Ken got up and brushed himself off and backed away. He didn't get mad.

He didn't come around Elvis again.

The next night at Graceland, in the kitchen, Elvis said, "Arlene, that guy's not for you — not now, not ever. Get rid of him!"

Some time later, Frances and I were sitting downstairs in the den with Elvis. We sat at the end of a long couch, across the coffee table from Elvis. Darlene was at the other end of the couch, picking out records to play on the stereo.

Elvis seemed so involved with his thoughts. He was obviously depressed. He was silent, looking at me and Frances.

"Elvis, what's bothering you?" I said.

He looked down for a moment. "Y'all are going to leave me," he said.

I thought he had lost his mind. I had no earthly idea of leaving. He was the center of my whole life. My life revolved around him.

"Y'all are going to leave me," he repeated, like a prophecy. There was sadness in his voice. Sadness in his face.

"Well, I'm not leaving," I said.

"Yes, you are," he said. "And it's going to be soon. Very soon."

"Why do you say that?" I said.

"Wait and you'll see," Elvis said.

Frances looked at me. Darlene put down the records and watched Elvis. He was in a deeply serious mood.

"I'm not sure which one of you will leave me first," he said. "But it's between Frances and Arlene." He looked at me. "I think it's going to be you, Arlene."

That sounded crazy. Everyone realized I was totally devoted to him. The other girls always said Elvis turned to me when he had problems requiring a woman to deal with it. It got even to such little things as not allowing anyone else but me to make his peanut butter and banana sandwich or to carry his hair brush. So, how could he think I would be the *first* to go? He meant the entire world and more to me.

He turned and looked down the couch at Darlene.

"Darlene is just going to disappear," he said.

This was hurting Elvis. You could see it. We tried to tell him we were not leaving him. He kept insisting that we would — and that it would be soon.

Elvis sat looking at me for a long while. A small smile moved his lips.

"You know," he said, "I'll always think of you with long, dark brown hair — not blonde like you have it now. Blonde is very becoming but I think of you with dark hair, as you used to be."

Elvis went out to California to make another movie.

Ken was leaving for Detroit on leave, to see his parents.

"Go with me," he said.

It was strange — like watching a movie and thinking you've seen it all before, somewhere.

I found myself engaged in Detroit to Kenny. He sent me back to Memphis to collect my things.

He wanted me to move back to Chicago and wait for him there while he went to Philadelphia on duty.

Back in Memphis, I came by the Pig 'n Whistle restaurant, looking for some of the gang. We sometimes hung out there.

I found Frances and Darlene sitting outside in Earl's car.

I got in the car and told them what had happened to me in Detroit.

After a minute, Frances said in a muffled voice, "You're going to wait and tell Elvis first, aren't you?"

I shook my head. "I can't tell him," I said.

"Why are you thinking about marrying right *now*?" Frances said. "Can't it wait?"

"It could," I said. "I promised Kenny I wouldn't put it off a long time. He loves me."

"Then, you have to call Elvis and tell him," Frances said. "Don't let him hear it through the grapevine."

Earl agreed. I had to call Elvis.

"Why are you doing this?" Darlene said.

"I don't know," I said. "Elvis will end up getting married, sooner or later, and then where will *I* be? I could never stand to be alone without him. And I sure don't want to be at Graceland when Elvis gets married."

Earl started the car. He pulled out of the parking lot where, during the years, we all had so much fun. He slowly drove away.

"Please, call Elvis and talk to him," Frances said.

I was silent. "Don't you know how fast Elvis could talk me out of this?" I said. "I *can't* talk to

him about it now. And if I wait until he comes home, if I see him, I know I won't go through with it."

Kenny and I were married. I went to live with him in Philadelphia. When he left on a cruise, I went back home to Chicago for that four months.

I felt stranded.

I missed Elvis. Everything was so strange, away from him.

Kenny came home from his cruise and we moved up to his new base at Norfolk, Virginia. When he got out of the military in May of 1965 we came back to Detroit.

Then Darlene moved with her parents to nearby Ypsilanti, Michigan. She was only twenty miles away and I went over to spend whole days with her — and to talk about Elvis.

She was making weekend trips occasionally to be with the gang. I lived on her reports of the things that were going on in Memphis.

"Elvis always asks about you," Darlene said. "He wants to know if you're happy. He asks if your husband is treating you all right."

Priscilla came over from Germany and was staying at Graceland. Darlene went down for a weekend.

"I went out to the Memphian Theater to the movies one night," she told me when she got back to Ypsilanti.

"Elvis and Priscilla drove up," she said. "Elvis saw me and he slammed on the brakes. He left the car sitting out in the middle of the street and came running over to me. That was right in front of the theater.

"It scared me half to death. He grabbed me and held me and said, 'Thank God, you're back.' It was a real case of Elvis over-reacting to something.

Looking it over.

"Priscilla had to park their car. She came up and he was still holding me. She said, 'Who is that?"

"Elvis said, '*That* is Darlene Daugherty.' Like I was really somebody."

My marriage ended three years later and I went home to Chicago with my son, Randy, who was three months old.

I had not talked to Elvis since I got married.

It did not seem the right thing to do. Especially because he was now married to Priscilla.

However, I thought it would be all right to call Elvis to wish him a happy birthday — January 8.

When I called on that day, I was told that Elvis and Priscilla had gone to Vernon's house for dinner.

I called again a couple of days later and was told that Elvis had gone to Nashville for a couple of days to do some recording.

Joe Esposito came on the line. He told me to call back the next day and he would arrange to put Elvis on.

When I hung up I was delighted — but a nervous wreck. I hadn't talked to Elvis for seven years. What would I say to him after such a long period of silence? How do you pick up the dropped threads? How do you bridge all those nights and days?

It would be a difficult conversation for both of us — sensing the wounds of time but with a memory of a closeness that never could be entirely destroyed.

Joe Esposito took my call. "*Hi, Arlene,*" he said. "*Hold on.*"

"*Hello?*" Elvis said.

"Elvis?" I said.

"*Yeah,*" he said. "*How are you.*"

"Just fine," I said. "I tried to get you for your birthday but I missed you."

"Oh, yeah," he said. *"It was kind of hectic around here. Haven't seen you in a long time."*

"I know," I said. "Well, I haven't forgotten you."

I heard him laugh. He sounded pleased.

"I hear you have a beautiful daughter," I said.

"Yeah," he said.

"I'd love to see her sometime," I said.

"Yeah," he said. *"Well, maybe you can. What are you doing?"*

"Nothing. I'm back in Chicago right now. I'm getting a divorce."

"Are you, really?" he said.

"Yeah. I hoped it wouldn't be that but, for three years, I knew it was coming."

"Well, it happens, sometimes," he said.

His reaction surprised me. Always before, he had told us that "marriage is forever." He could not tolerate the idea of divorce. When he indicated a shift in his thinking, I knew that something was going wrong in his own life.

"Maybe I'll see you," Elvis said.

"Do you ever see any of the gang?" I said.

"Yeah, I see some of 'em," he said. *"They're still around. Most of 'em are out in Hollywood."*

"I didn't realize how long it was until I called the first time and Joe had to stop and think who I was," I said.

"Yeah," Elvis said. *"It's been quite a while. The time has gone by pretty fast."*

"Did you get the package I sent for Christmas?" I said.

"Huh?"

"Did you get the package I sent for Christmas?"

"Yeah, I sure did, honey," he said. *"Thank you, very much."*

"I really didn't know what to send. But I hoped you like it anyway."

"Yeah," he said. *"Well, maybe I'll see ya sometime."*

We kept repeating little phrases to fill up the gaps.

"Say hello to Priscilla," I said.

"Okay," he said. *"Nice talking to you. Thanks for calling."*

"Bye," I said.

"Bye, bye," he said.

When I hung up the phone I knew I would have to go see him before much more time had passed.

Soon after, a strange thing happened.

When Ken and I separated, I brought back home with me a Ouija board. I used to play with the board in the evenings at my parents' house with a neighbor.

I began asking the Ouija board questions about Elvis.

I asked the Ouija board where I would see Elvis again.

It spelled out Las Vegas.

I said to myself, "That is ridiculous." I asked the Ouija board again where I would see Elvis again. It again spelled out *Las Vegas.*

So I asked, "Where will it be in Las Vegas?"

It spelled out, *Brand new hotel."*

I asked what Elvis would be doing at the hotel.

It answered, *Performing.*

I knew the Ouija board was wrong. Elvis often said he would never perform in Las Vegas again. He had played there in 1956 and did not like it. He hated the place.

I asked where I would see him first. It said, *Backstage in his dressing room."*

Several weeks later, the neighbor came running over to my parents' house with a newspaper. There was an article in it about a new hotel being built in Las Vegas.

"This must be the *brand new hotel* the Ouija board was talking about," the neighbor said.

Later, they came back with another article. It had a picture of Elvis in it, standing outside the new hotel with its owner, Kirk Kerkorian, signing a contract for Elvis to perform there.

"The Ouija board was right," the neighbor said.

"So far," I said. I could hardly believe it.

It was August of 1969 when I arrived in Las Vegas.

I ran into Vernon in the lobby of the International Hotel almost immediately after I arrived. We hugged and kissed each other. He asked me if Elvis knew I was there. I said Elvis didn't know.

I had four beautiful evening gowns with me. I had planned to be wearing the white one when Elvis saw me. But the first evening I was there, I was in the lobby wearing my blue one. I was trying to get a peek into the big Showroom where Elvis would be performing.

Joe Esposito came wandering through and saw me. He came over and hugged me.

"What are you doing?" he said. "You're not standing in line, are you? Come on with me."

He grabbed my hand and led me over to see Emilio, the *maitre de*. The two of them looked at the big sheet of tables and guest seating.

Joe pointed to a spot. "Seat her right here," he said.

"Come on, Arlene," Joe said. "I'll seat you, myself."

Joe led me to a table in the showroom and pulled out the chair for me.

"Here we are," he said. "Right up at the stage."

Elvis' mike was center stage. My table was right next to it. I was flabbergasted.

Joe said, "Arlene, remember, you don't pay. Elvis is paying for it all. Don't even leave a tip. Don't spend a dime. This one's on Elvis."

It was a beautiful room, seats all in red, with lots of white highlights and a ceiling that was as dark as the night sky over the desert. The room seated about two thousand. I had never seen Elvis perform to such a small crowd.

The show started and different acts came on. People talked and waited. Elvis was coming on soon.

I was scared. How would I feel when I saw him again, this close? What would he think of me now? Would he like the blue gown I was wearing?

From my table, I could see past the huge stage curtains into the wings where the new acts made their entrance.

I saw something white coming in the distance and somebody with them. Oh, my God, I thought. It's Elvis!

They came closer to the edge of the curtain while the other act was still performing. They waited.

It was Elvis and he looked incredibly gorgeous. So trim and neat. He looked fantastic. Joe was with him, one hand on his shoulder and the other hand pointing out where I was sitting.

Elvis was smiling and throwing me kisses. I was throwing them back.

It was so much like old times — except that

Elvis was married and it really was different than it use to be.

It was like a shot of adrenalin for everyone in the big room when Elvis strolled onstage — a smile and a swing and a wink.

Elvis kept smiling and grinning down at me all through the show.

When Joe seated me, he said, "After the show, call the dressing room. Your name will be left on a list so the call will come through. We'll either meet you or tell you how to get to the dressing room. Elvis will want to see you after the show."

During the show, Elvis kept winking at me. He was a big winker.

After the show, I called the dressing room. Lamar answered. He told me how to find Elvis' dressing room.

"I'll meet you halfway down the corridor," he said.

Just outside Elvis' dressing room there was a couch and chair in the hallway. Vernon was there. Two other girls who had never met Elvis before were seated on the couch.

Vernon sat on a chair by me.

I was a nervous wreck. It was as if I had never met Elvis before in my life. This was another world.

Vernon began teasing me. "What in the world are *you* nervous about?" he said. "Knowing Elvis as well as you do?"

"It's been seven years," I said.

"You'll relax as soon as you see him," Vernon said.

I heard Elvis humming. He was hurrying down the hall. I leaned out from the couch so I could see past the two girls. He was dressed in a white, corduroy vest jacket. He looked divine.

His fingers looked thinner than I had ever seen them.

He came up to the two girls next to me and squatted down in front of them. They began gushing over him — and he smiled and blushed!

Then he looked at me for the first time. He reached a hand over to take one of mine.

"I'll be with you in a minute, child," he said. "Don't you go anywhere."

That was the first thing he had said to me in seven years.

His touch and his voice were still so warm. He hadn't changed. It was Elvis. I could close my eyes and the time that stood between us seemed melted away.

Then he took my other hand and I stood up and he just took me in his arms and hugged me. He kissed me. "Hi, darlin'."

I was so surprised. I didn't know what to think of that. This was a married Elvis. Do I tell him I miss him and love him? I didn't know how to act with him.

It didn't seem to bother him a bit.

One of the girls said, "Elvis, are you happy now?"

He looked at me and said, "I guess so." It didn't sound very enthusiastic.

"I think I know what you're saying, Elvis," I said.

"You always did," he said.

Things were not well with him. I knew him — and I could see he was unhappy. It hurt me.

When I looked at his sparkling white jacket I saw that my makeup had smeared on it.

"Oh, no," I said.

He looked down, following my eyes. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Hell, it was worth it."

Vernon laughed and told him how nervous I had been while we were all waiting.

"Arlene was sitting here like some little fan that never had met you before," he said, laughing.

"Oh, really?" Elvis said.

"Well, it's been seven years, you know," I said.

Elvis frowned. "Has it been that long?" he said. "I don't believe it."

He smiled. "Do you still remember Memphis?"

"How can I forget?" I said.

"I hope you never do," he said.

Priscilla was upstairs so I didn't go up to see everybody after the show. The wives of the other guys were there. It would have made it clumsy for everyone. What could I have said or done in that situation?

Emilio gave me a special card so that I could sit in the same place to see Elvis perform every night while I was in Las Vegas. Sometimes, after a show, I would go out for breakfast with some of the others from the show.

Vernon, one night, told me and James Burton, the lead guitar player in Elvis' band, about a breakfast deal he had found.

"Let's all go down to the Dunes," he said, grabbing my arm. "They've got all the breakfast you can eat for a *dollar*!"

Elvis seldom spoke to personal friends from the stage. But there was a real feeling of closeness each night as he would look down at me and smile or wink.

I knew he still cared.

I came back to Las Vegas several times. Vernon and the others were always sweet to me and took care of any problems I had. But it remained impossible to find an appropriate time to be with Elvis.

I worked for Cook County in Chicago as a deputy sheriff in the courts from 1971 into 1975. I came to Memphis on weekends when I could. Even then, Memphis felt more like home that Chicago. Sometimes I would drop by the front gate at Graceland to say hello to Uncle Vester and ask about the family and how Elvis was getting along.

Sometimes I rode up to the house with him in his Jeep. I'd visit with people on the patio. Elvis was never in town on those occasions. I never wanted to do something that would make it clumsy for anyone. Priscilla was there. Later, Linda or Ginger.

In the winter of 1973-74, I was with Frances and Heidi at the Memphian Theater. Many of the gang were there, along with a lot of other people who were allowed in.

Elvis walked up to us and said, "Are y'all going to be here tomorrow night?"

We told him we were. He nodded.

The next night, when he arrived, Elvis came over to us and gave each of us a velvet box.

We opened it and there was the gold TLC — for Tender Loving Care — emblem on a gold necklace.

I remember his hands as he gave them to us.

During the movies, with the theater about half filled with Elvis' friends, I would sit several rows behind Elvis and Priscilla.

One night, at the end of the movie, Priscilla got up and moved up the aisle with someone, talking to them. Elvis remained in his seat, just looking up at the empty screen.

I walked down and sat down in the row directly behind him.

"Elvis," I said.

He turned around and looked at me as if he

had seen a ghost.

He reached his hand out to me. Then he looked beyond me at Priscilla — and dropped his hand.

"Are you okay?" I said.

He nodded. "Yeah. I'm okay. How about you?"

Tears came to his eyes.

He turned and walked up the aisle. At the door he turned and looked back at me for a long moment.

In September of 1975 I had stopped at the front gate to say hello to some people I recognized. I was standing there, talking to a girl from Denver named Shirley Luke. She was talking about Elvis.

My son, Randy, who was ten years old then, came running up to me crying.

"Mother," he said, grabbing me.

"What is it?" I said, alarmed.

"I *saw* him!" he said. "And he *smiled and said hello*!"

"You saw Elvis?" I said.

"Yes," he said, breathless. "I was around at the back gate. He drove out that way on his three wheeler. He looked right at me and he *smiled*."

"Did you tell him who you were?" I said.

He shook his head. "No."

Shirley and I became friends. She went with me to Birmingham for Elvis' show there on December 29, 1976.

I gave a greeting card to Pauline, one of Elvis' maids, to give to Elvis on the night before he left. It had the words inside from the song, "You've Got A Friend."

Just before we left for Birmingham, I called Pauline.

"Miss Arlene," she said, "Elvis read it and started using it to mark his place in the Bible. And

I saw him put it in his personal case to take with him on the road."

The case contained his professional organization cards, his personal jewelry, medicine, things like that.

Shirley and I drove down to Birmingham together.

Before the show, we talked to Lamar and Charlie and to Felton Jarvis in the lobby of the hotel where Elvis was staying.

They were all in a rush. The tour was going to hit five big cities in only five nights. When the show was over, they had to head out for Atlanta and then to Pittsburgh for the New Year's Eve show.

Our seats that night were in the balcony just to Elvis' right and just ahead of the stage. The decision to go to Birmingham was sudden so we didn't have the usual front and center seats.

Shirley had her binoculars and she kept crying, "Arlene, he knows where you are! I swear he does. He keeps looking up at you! Here, take the binoculars."

In the middle of the song, "Love Letters," the lyrics are, *"I memorize every line."* That night, when Elvis sang it, he added *"over and over and over again. You know that I do."*

He turned and looked up and pointed in our area and repeated the words, *"You know that I do."*

Shirley gripped my arm. "God, this is so spooky!"

It was like the startled reaction of a girl named Ann Marie "Buttons" McClain during Elvis' last show in Memphis on July 5, 1976.

Uncle Vester had given her the "Buttons" nickname the first time he saw her down at the front gate at Graceland — wearing a coat that was

loaded down with all kinds of Elvis buttons.

She noticed that Elvis kept turning to look in the front row, right in front of him, and sending me a smile.

"I started counting those smiles and stopped after it got to twenty-nine," said "Buttons" later.

Driving home after the concert, my son, Randy, saw the huge crowd at the front gate at Graceland. He begged me to stop and see if Elvis was down there, talking to fans.

"Buttons" was in the crowd. She recognized me and came up to me and introduced herself.

"I have to know who the girl is that Elvis kept smiling at," she said. "I have to know who gets that kind of attention from Elvis.

"Sometimes, when he was in the middle of introducing the people who work on stage with him, he would *stop* — and look back at you. It was really strange to watch."

I remembered how much fun Elvis had with some of the letters I had written him from Germany. It gave me an idea.

Elvis' cousin, Harold Lloyd, could make the ugliest face you could imagine. He would make his mouth sort of collapse in, then add a frown to that. It was horrible.

One day, he came over to the townhouse where Randy and I lived. I got out one of my old wigs and had him put it on — then make one of those horrible faces. I placed him behind a bush, as if he were just rising out of it, and took his picture.

I sent a copy of it up to Elvis.

Pauline told me later that Elvis died laughing. He told her how Harold made that face — and how much fun we used to have when we were all together.

Rose Clayton went with me to see some of Elvis' shows in 1977. She was a public school teacher who went on to write for such top musical magazines as Billboard, Amusement Biz, Rolling Stone and Country Rhythms. She joined the staff of Memphis State University and arranged the first annual memorial tribute to Elvis, bringing in top writers and musicians for the event. She moved from that into television production in Nashville.

Before she and I left to see his May 20 concert in Knoxville at the University of Tennessee, I sent a note to Elvis saying, "See you in Knoxville, front row center."

He came out of the wings just beaming. He kept looking down in the audience for somebody as he began his first song. He was scanning faces.

"He's looking in the wrong place," Rose said.

Then Elvis began looking back in our direction. He did a big double take when he saw me.

He kept looking down at me and smiling.

Rose finally said, "Arlene, how can you *stand* it? This is so obvious — his eye contact."

Rose was with me at Elvis' show in May of 1977 at Binghampton, New York.

Tom Diskin saw us standing at the registration desk of the Treadway Hotel where the show was staying.

"Wait," he said. "You girls can have Charlie Stone's room. It's just a couple of doors down the hall from Elvis."

Charlie worked for Concerts West and went ahead of the show to make arrangements. He was leaving within the hour. We could have his room for the two days Elvis would be appearing there.

This was an incredible break — two whole days, just two doors down the hall from Elvis! We couldn't believe how it was working out.

But when the night shift of guards came on, they told us we were not supposed to be in Room 825.

"Tom Diskin said we could use it," I said.

The guard went to check with Elvis.

Then he came back.

He said Elvis had not known we were there but he gave instructions that we were to remain in Room 825.

* * *

It was strange.

We spent two days and nights that close to Elvis — and still could not spend one moment with him except across the footlights during the concerts.

Elvis' guys always said he was working on the show. Or that he was busy. Or resting.

More and more, Elvis' friends were being kept away from him.

* * *

The curtain was much heavier now — and it was slowly falling.

A smile at the gate.

EPILOGUE

Elvis often told us that he had won every goal he had ever set out to achieve. He considered himself blessed.

In just a few brief years, and with incredible ease, Elvis had built for himself a private kingdom. He had his own white pillared castle and his own band of loyal followers. They were all his joy.

He longed, as all men do, to hold back the widening cracks and crumbles that must come with time.

"It seemed harder on Elvis than on most people when things started to change," said his cousin, Wayne Mann. "He wanted to keep everything the way he found it.

"It hurt him when his friends began to marry and move away. He felt he was being left alone, up there on the hill.

"He told me, one day, 'Wayne, it looks like all my friends are starting to go off on their own separate ways.'

"I didn't want to tell him that I was going to get married.

"When I finally did go in to talk to him about it, he just stood there a minute.

"Then he smiled and said, 'Well, another one

of you has bit the dust.' He looked away. 'I wish we could all be together again. Like it use to be.' "

Elvis surrounded himself with those he loved. So did we love him in return.

Together we made a world which dreams are made of.

The dreams may now be gone — but our memories will live on forever.

The End

My Dearest Elvis,

This one's for you.

I deeply hope this one will help make up for those that wronged you, which you never ever deserved. I believe in my heart that at this time, you would agree this story must be told. I have done this with a totally clear conscience because there is no guilt to be felt in the truth. The world full of people who love you deserve that much. The history of you deserves that much.

More than anything else, I feel you would have been proud of this endeavor. Knowing you as I did, I believe you would have told me, "Go ahead."

It's also my way of attempting to thank you for filling my life with a love, warmth and joy that words could never describe. I owe so much to you for all the personal happiness you gave me. A part of you will always live in me.

If I can help your fans all over the world who loved you, to know you as you were, I will have truly accomplished what I set out to do. It's the very least I can do.

You gave everything you had to give, Elvis, to the world and to your friends. This is one who never took it for granted.

You were so very special and I am so much better a person for having known you and so proud that I was blessed enough to have been one of those who were so extremely close to you. To have been so much a part of your life, as you were mine.

You were absolutely one in a lifetime, Elvis Presley. It's not been easy trying to put you into words. It's a different world without you.

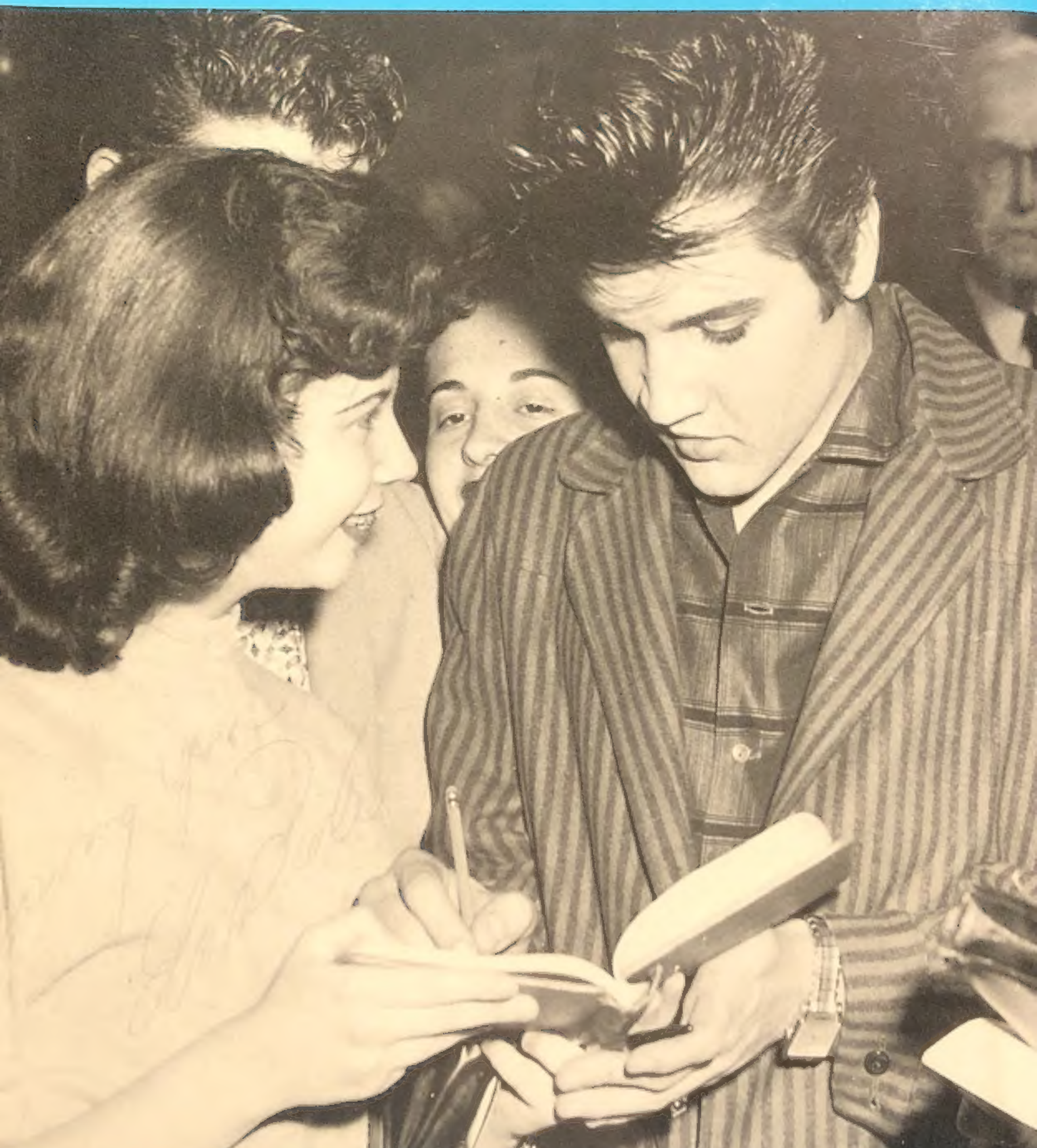
My heart and my soul are devoted to projecting you in this book, as you really were and for all to know you as I have.

You are deeply missed. Cherished are the memories.

With love and gratitude

Arlene

X X X



"Elvis would be proud."

Patsy Presley Lambill